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CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS OF FOCUSING
1978–2008

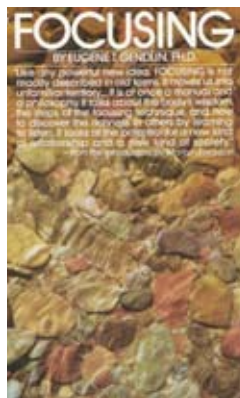


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THE FOLIO

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To order hard copies of this Folio please go to: <http://www.focusing.org/tributefolio2008>

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

[Bala]

Way back in March of '08, one of my colleagues just happened to mention in passing that Gene's book came out in 1978. I was astounded. That made the book thirty years old! *Could it really be 30 years since the Focusing book was introduced to the public...?* What had transpired in the Focusing world between then and now...?

My mind (as I imaged it) looked like the inner workings of a clock: spinning, ticking, synchronizing parts...*30 years...ummm... Something* needed to happen to mark this momentous event. It didn't take long...I woke up at 3am with a mantra: *A Tribute Folio* — *yes!* This was an occasion that had to be publicly marked.

I needed help — a really skilled and articulate co-editor, well versed in editing and writing — and someone who (if I may use an oxymoron) had a *serious sense of humor!* We'd definitely need one to be able to pull off a Folio of this size in such a short period of time. I called Paula Nowick.

[Paula]

Ahhh...the offer was hard to turn down: long hours, high pressure, and no money. Yes, a *serious sense of humor* was needed here! After we got through laughing, I began to think seriously about this project and what it meant to me...

Any of us could imagine what an acorn might be in thirty years, but probably none among us could have envisioned the remarkable future of a small 174 page book published in 1978. That book, with its simple one-word title ***Focusing*** bolded across a cover showing pebbles under moving water, would in thirty short years herald the beginning of a paradigm change that, as one of our contributors suggested, could bring hope to a broken world. The unanticipated influence of *Focusing* to stimulate fresh thinking about healing — personally, intellectually, and communally — is continuing to unfold across multiple disciplines. Thus, to honor this landmark, the thirtieth anniversary of *Focusing*, it seemed proper to dedicate an entire *Folio* as a tribute to the very many ways that Focusing has profoundly impacted the lives and professions of Focusers around the world.

And so we went to work, putting out a letter, asking for proposals, setting dead-lines, and gathering Guest Editors to help us out with the first-draft articles. Then the blitz began. Sometimes the articles poured in faster than we could read them; some of the translations into English were very complex and took many more hours than we had imagined. Then there was the world of technology, when one or another of our e-mails crashed at some crucial editing moment — and the frustration — hours and hours on the phone with our servers, hearts pounding in high angst. Humor — right!

One of the highlights for us was around some of the unexpected connections and wonderful friendships we made — priceless and rewarding new bonds for which we are deeply grateful.

So at this juncture, (with a bit of irony thrown in) it just happens that The Tribute Folio took nine months to birth, and indeed, the baby is born and we present it to you with a deep sense of awe, celebration, and gratitude for all the support we have received in our deeply shared love of the work: Focusing.

Our vision: From the beginning we knew that we wanted to put our attention on the evolution of Focusing over the past thirty years from the original six-step model to the numerous integrations and applications that have evolved out of that original process. As you will see, the contents of this issue are very rich and diverse and cover a large territory, from profoundly philosophical to utterly practical. For clarity, we have divided this issue into five parts:

Part 1: FOCUSING THEORY AND PRACTICE, covers a storehouse of meaningful material starting with Christine Langeveld and Erna de Bruijn's twenty year perspective and changing views on teaching about the impact of The Critic. Marine de Fréminville details her work on using the Background Feeling as a transformative and powerful tool in Focusing. Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin were each planning to write an article; in the end they decided to keep their team spirit and write both articles together explicating their work on Inner Relationship Focusing and Treasure Maps to the Soul. From Israel we have the totally 'practical' version of Focusing from Atsmaout Perlstein and Bilha Frolinger, in which they teach us how to do "Focusing On The Go".

Part 2: PHILOSOPHY presents a wide-ranging selection from a diverse group of writers. Herb Schroeder, an environmental psychologist, shares his research on the felt sense of natural environments undertaken as part of his work for the United States Forest Service. Nada Lou's interest in philosophy and work with TAE is evident in her fascinating piece on The Passageway Into The Implicit giving us an even clearer insight into Gendlin's philosophy. From Japan we have a most interesting and informative contribution from Tadayuki Murasato, comparing the philosophy of Kitaro Nishida and Eugene Gendlin. Kevin Krycka begins his article with a childhood memory, which metamorphoses into an exposition of one of Gendlin's concepts in The Nature of Our Exceeding. Kye Nelson, who has worked very closely with Gendlin, shares her vision about Why The Philosophy of the Implicit Matters. And finally ending this section, Thomas Froitzheim speaks about his passion for finding the True and Non-Dual Self, and how Clearing A Space assists in that process.

Part 3: CROSSING FOCUSING. The entries in this section align with our vision of exploring the evolution of Focusing over a thirty-year period and clearly demonstrate how many different integrations and utilizations people have used to *cross* Focusing in their various fields.

With the Arts: We start with Laury Rappaport's Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy summarizing her innovative development of an enriched approach to art therapy incorporating the fundamentals of Focusing. Tereza Crvenkovic, in her piece entitled Focusing and Writing about Doing the Dance, illuminates an area we don't often discuss: the difficulties of writing experientially about folk dancing and the invaluable assistance of Focusing in the writing process. Then, David Orth, a very talented philosopher, sculpture, and builder of furniture, shares his ruminations on the essence of the creative process in Clearing a Space on the Workbench: How Focusing Helps Me Build.

With Bodywork: This section offers two articles highlighting some breakthrough discoveries when integrating Focusing with physical movement. First, Kevin McEvenue and Glenn Fleisch co-author an article demonstrating the benefits of integrating Focusing into their individual areas of expertise in the Wholebody Focusing Story. Seven authors, Larry Hurst, Jack Blackburn, Francesca Castaldi, Mathias Dekeyser, Claudia Conza, Steven Scholle, and Nicoletta Corsetti, have each had a part in Tying the Thread of Bodywork, Movement, and Focusing, in an article describing their unexpectedly rich collegiality as they experimented with applications of Focusing as a basis of their organizing during a bodyworkers' conference.

With Education: Akiko Doi, in Let the Felt Sense Speak in English, shares a meaningful experience highlighting specifically how, through Focusing, she helped transform a group of reluctant students studying English as a Second Language into eager and 'happy' conversationalists. Joan Klagsbrun, in Finding Sanctuary in a Stressful Environment, shares the results of incorporating Clearing a Space into the opening of her college and graduate classes, including some very informative and positive student evaluations of improved concentration, learning, and reducing overall stress levels.

With Psychotherapy: Salvador Moreno Lopez discusses and demonstrates through transcripts several crucial ways the complex process of supervising new therapists in training can be enhanced by the supervisor's integration of Focusing techniques. Finally, Dave Young explains and applies some of Gendlin's most basic concepts in the Process Model as it forms the framework of his family therapy practice in his challenging article, Sing Focusing and Systems!

With Business: Kathy McGuire brings Focusing and The Creative Edge Pyramid together incorporating Listening/Focusing into the workplace as she details a new "kind" of Focusing Community.

With Children: First, Heidrun Essler, René Veugelers, and Simon Kilner present a fascinating explanation about their current work and forward-moving directions in Children Are The Future. Next, Lucy Bowers tracks her career with children from the 'early landscape' of working in the school system to the current progression of introducing Focusing into the classroom in Gene Gendlin's Gift for Children.

With Community Wellness: Pat Omidian and Nina Joy Lawrence end this section by taking us back to Afghanistan to demonstrate their Work In Progress, illustrating how they adapt the Focusing process to meet the cultural needs of the Afghan community.

Part 4: PERSONAL JOURNEYS. This issue would not be complete without the sharing of some personal journeys and true stories about the effects of directly using the Focusing process with deeply felt issues and concerns.

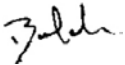
Thérèse Fortier and Solange St. Pierre share their experience of Partnership, Friendship, and Mentoring, outlining the personal stages, ups and downs, and the development of their process as partners and friends. Rob Foxcroft in Doing The Thing You Love writes as only Rob can, and we'd do his article a disservice to even try to describe it — we'll just say, it is *poetry!* Elena Frezza, writing about Focusing and Chronic Pain, shares a personal journey detailing her experience of how Focusing transforms the ability to 'relate' to severe physical

obstacles. In their article on *Cultivating A Graced Life*, mother and daughter Marianne and Elizabeth Thompson team up to share their parent/child experiences of having Focusing be a natural part of their daily living and relationship together. John Keane also talks about his journey with chronic illness, illuminating the realm of dealing with ongoing health issues through the lens of Focusing, the philosophy of implicit entry, and narrative philosophy. Finally, Debbie Belne ends this section with a charming and insightful tale of how to use Focusing with a very cranky child who has just received some not-good-news in her tale of Focusing with her daughter 'Under The Covers'. For those dealing with young children — you'll love this!

Part 5: We end this Folio with some inspirational words and hopes from Eugene Gen-dlin presenting his Vision Statement For Focusing, and Action Steps and Projects for the next thirty years.

We will stop now so you can read this journal. It has been a joy for us to produce the TRIBUTE ISSUE and to celebrate with you our Thirty Years of Focusing! We hope you enjoy it.

With regards from your editors,



Bala Jaison, Ph.D.



Paula Nowick, *Ed. D.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge and extend our deep appreciation to the following people for their commitment and support in the production of this special Tribute Issue.

First, to each of our Guest Editors, who generously gave many hours of work, and supportive assistance to their writers. Thank you.

Pauline Albers Mitchell, Lucy Bowers, Tom Brouillette, Franc Chamberlain, Beverly Chiu, Ann Weiser Cornell, Carolyn Ducca, Glenn Fleisch, Rob Foxcroft, Marine de Fréminville, Ruth Hirsch, Edwin Holloway, Larry Hurst, Joan Klagsbrun, Joyce Kornblatt, Kevin Kryka, Mary Lawlor, Patricia Manessy, Kathy McGuire, Suzanne Noel, Cathy Pascal, Laury Rappaport, Beki An Sciacca, and Jim Strohl.

To the Emergency Last Minute Proof-reading team: You bailed us out when we were down to an impossible time crunch to assist us with the final proofing of this whole book. We couldn't have done it without you. Thank you so much.

Debbie Belne, Lucy Bowers, Franc Chamberlain, Ann Weiser Cornell, Edwin Holloway, Larry Hurst, Rob Foxcroft, Thomas Froitzheim, Joan Klagsbrun, Nina Joy Lawrence, Pauline Albers Mitchel, David Orth, Cathy Pascal, Beki An Sciacca.

Cover Art: To David Orth, our profound thanks for your commitment: listening to our vision, finding and assembling just the right picture, and helping to bring the cover to fruition with incredible patience and caring. Heartfelt thanks.

Layout and Design: Our endless appreciation (and awe!) to Carolyn Kasper for your astounding attention to detail, talent, vision, and ability to take the many attachments we sent you and turn them all into a beautiful book that the Focusing world will treasure for posterity. We thank you.

And finally, many thanks to the Focusing Institute and Eugene Gendlin for your support and encouragement to us for this project.



PART 1

FOCUSING THEORY AND PRACTICE



ON OUR WAY WITH THE CRITIC

Christine Langeveld and Erna de Bruijn

INTRODUCTION

It was in the early eighties that my friend Erna de Bruijn met Focusing. One of her patients gave her Gendlin's pocketbook *Focusing* (1981). She read it, did a session on her own and knew for sure, "This is what I've been looking for, for many years."

When she tried to share her experience with me, I felt a lot of resistance: yet another "good for me" something that wouldn't help me! It took more than a year before something shifted. What happened here... was it a Critic that blocked me, out of fear of all that could surface?

In the early nineties Erna and I became certified as Focusing Trainers and started to teach together. In that first year (1993) we had 40 students in Level 1, the next year 51. Only a quarter of them continued on to Level 2. In contrast, in the past two years (2006 and 2007), three quarters of our Level 1 students went on to Level 2, and about half of them to Level 3 and 4. Many of them want to be trained as Focusing professionals.

What has made this difference?

Looking back we can recognize three main developments:

1. The basic attitude of Focusing — being present to whatever is there inside — has taken a more central place in our teaching.
2. Focusing has become more and more integrated in our lives; consequently, more and more we are not only teaching Focusing but modeling Focusing as well. From there we are able to teach more reliably about the basics.
3. We have achieved a deeper understanding of the nature of the Critic, which is so often active from the very start when learning Focusing. If it is not identified early on, the Critic can block or undermine the whole process. We have also developed a clearer view on the position of the Child Within as related to the Critic.

All three aspects are interwoven. In this article we will discuss the Critic as a special area in which the attitude of openness and gentleness can bring forth miracles.

OUR HISTORY WITH THE CRITIC

In the eighties, Gendlin's *Focusing* was a very important and influential book for us. It had opened up a whole new way of connecting with ourselves and our inner knowing. We were fascinated by how Focusing worked and grateful for what it brought about. At that time we didn't even notice that very little attention was paid to the Critic.

In the one-and-a-half pages that Gendlin devoted to it, the Critic is described as “a nasty voice,” speaking at you from outside, not from within you as a felt sense would; the Critic is to be discerned from your conscience, the ‘still small voice’ inside. Everyone has such a destructive part, and others have named this part as “super-ego,” “bad parent,” or “animus.” It is the Critic’s nasty tone that makes it so destructive, even more devastating than the content of its messages that might contain true information. Gendlin advises, “*Do not respect your Critic...* The best way to deal with the Critic... is to wave it away with some disrespectful comment” (1981, p. 98).

And so we did. We put our Critic off to the side; this proved to be helpful in several cases, but not in all.

In 1992 we attended the Weeklong Intensive Workshop in Chicago. In the training *Manual* (1992), Bala Jaison describes the Critic as a voice that talks in a harsh, bitter, cruel, overly concerned, generalizing way. “It infiltrates our inner space, takes some vulnerable part and exaggerates or distorts it so that we feel awful. The result is often paralyzing — we are no longer able to act.”

Further on, Jaison provided us with a new perspective on the reason why the Critic is so powerful. “The Critic is able to get your attention because, however false or exaggerated its statements are, they always contain some ‘grain of truth.’” Thus, because of the Critic’s power, she emphasized two essential skills that Focusers should master: learning to distinguish the Critic from your true self and training yourself to create a distance between you and your Critic. Practice stopping it when it appears. You might want to assure it that you’ll consider what it has to say at some future date, *but not now!* The suggestion of listening to the Critic at some other time was new to us.

During an afternoon spent on the Critic, we tried several approaches. One approach was to attack the Critic in the same way it attacks us. So we put our Critic in front of us and started shouting, using harsh and bitter words. It made us aware of the impact of the destructive behaviour of the Critic, but didn’t bring any relief. One of the younger participants stated, “I wouldn’t want to treat anybody like this, even not my Critic.”

Jaison’s approach as described in the *Manual* proved to be far more preferable.

In 1993 we came across a publication in German entitled, “*Focusing ist eine kleine Tür*” (“Focusing is a little door”). It is a transcript by Johannes Wiltshko of a workshop given by Gendlin during the Focusing Sommerschule 1992 in Achberg, Germany. Talking about the Critic, Gendlin gave the same message as in his book: a Focuser must push the Critic out of the way when it interrupts. He suggests: 1.) Don’t believe him, don’t respect him; he’s always saying the same thing, he doesn’t know the situation. 2.) Don’t take him too seriously; use humour! Say something like, “You can come back when you’ve got something new to say.” 3.) Take some time to recuperate from an attack and go on with your session. And 4.) (This was new advice, and in line with what we had just learned from the weeklong!) If the Critic happens to have something useful to say, this might be something to focus on—but at a different time, not during or right after an attack (Gendlin, p. 99-102).

Watching Gendlin guiding people in live sessions (Weeklong, 1992; Sommerschule, Achberg, 1996) and on several videotapes, we saw him using all of these strategies.

The overall tendency we met in other contexts during those years, was that the Critic is a voice coming from outside. When it pops up during a Focusing session, it blocks the process, so we need to find the right words to tell it to “go away” or “keep quiet”. If you feel there might be some truth in what it is saying, wait until you can be with it in a non-reactive way.

We’d like to clarify that this is not meant as a complete overview of how, at that time, the Focusing community regarded the Critic and how the Critic should be approached; it is simply a description of our understanding of the issues. This way we treated our own Critic, and taught about the Critic in our classes in 1993 and 1994.

However, when we used this approach, neither we nor our students found real relief when encountering the Critic.

Gradually more elaborate views emerged and brought some changes. In 1993 Ann Weiser Cornell gave a workshop in our Focusing Centre in The Hague. From her we learned that just acknowledging the Critic was very helpful, and that instead of telling the Critic to go away or keep quiet, asking it to do so worked even better.

A year later she came again to our centre and brought *The Focusing Student’s Manual* (3rd Edition, 1994). It became an important resource for us.

There the Critic was still described as a voice: “that harsh inner voice which attacks you with shaming accusations” (p. 37). Cornell also said that, “The Critic gets in the way of Focusing. Some people find their lives completely dominated by the Critic” (p. 37-38). And, “As with all blocks, identifying the Critic is more than half the battle. Try saying, ‘That’s my Critic,’ and see if that is enough to make it lose most of its power” (p. 38).

In the event that it persists, more might be needed. Here she gives some nuances: “There *may* be a grain of truth in what the Critic is telling you... The Critic may represent an unhealed part of you that has been cut off from love and acceptance.” Being compassionate to this Critic and listening to the hurt that’s under the harshness can bring good results (p. 38).

In the Manual, three techniques for dealing with it are suggested: 1.) Ask the Critic to step aside and be quiet. 2.) Ask it to offer the same information in a more supportive way. 3.) If the two first techniques haven’t worked, actually focus on it (p. 68-70).

What was new and essentially different for us about Cornell’s approach were her suggestions that we should offer more politeness and respect towards the Critic, listening to the hurt under the harshness. She also urged us to keep an eye out for the role of the Critic, not only in Focusing but also in a person’s life.

At The International Conference 1994, in Germany, we attended a workshop by Dieter Müller on the Inner Critic. In line with Gendlin, Müller regarded the Critic as blocking the Focusing process, and he recommended putting it off to the side as soon as possible. However, he contributed a new perspective: paying attention to the object of criticism, because it is the object of criticism that is essential, not the criticism itself.

In Müller’s article “Dealing with Self-Criticism: The Critic within us and the Criticized One” (1995) he suggested three steps in dealing with the Critic: identifying it; hearing

it but disregarding it; and changing the focus from Criticizer to Criticized. Once the Critic is stripped of its destructive influence, it functions as a signpost to something or someone inside. For example, it might reveal a vulnerable child within. We might stay with this little person for a while and see if it's possible to be with it in a friendly way, so that perhaps it is able to share how it feels and what it really needs; thus we can give it our attention and keep it company in a loving way.

Surprisingly new in Müller's approach was this paying attention to the criticized part, making room for it and building a relationship with it.

About the same time, Mia Leijssen's book in Dutch, *Gids voor gesprekstherapie (A Guide to Therapy)* (1995), was published, containing an important chapter on Focusing. Leijssen wrote her book from her experiences as a therapist; she states that the Critic, in its various forms, is the most frequently occurring obstacle in her clients' Focusing processes.

She discerns two types of Critic: 1. The Critic that has taken over the critical role of a parent or other authority figure from the past; when the client has recognized the origin of this Critic, most of the time he or she can easily let it go or set it aside. 2. The Critic that has been created to help the vulnerable child survive, e.g. to protect it from experiencing feelings that would be unbearable for the child. This second Critic can't be put aside straight away; that would be disrespectful. It deserves to be acknowledged for its helping and protecting role. After the client has come to an understanding of its motivation and methods, and maybe even appreciation of its tenacity, he or she can check at what moments and to what extent this part is still needed. Thus the client takes over the responsibility. Then the attention can be brought back to the part that has been oppressed by the Critic.

The therapist actively helps the client move through this process by first identifying the type of Critic, then choosing between either bypassing the interruption and continuing the Focusing process or responding to the Critic and trying to find a new way of dealing with it.

If the therapist chooses to follow the client's attention to the Critic, s/he assists the client to first acknowledge, then 'dis-identify' from the Critic. The client is invited to visualize the Critic and take time to explore its intentions. Then the client returns to paying attention to the oppressed part (1995, p. 163-165).

This new view, with its emphasis on and appreciation of the primitive protective function the Critic had in the past, made perfect sense to us. We sensed the importance of the moment of choice in a session: either to respond to or bypass the Critic, and we also appreciated the steps Leijssen outlined that can lead to a better knowing and understanding of the Critic, such as visualizing and exploring.

Something similar happened when, in 1995, Ann Weiser Cornell came again to our Centre and presented parts of the Treasure Maps to the Soul. In the metaphorical landscape, the Critic is embodied by the Dragon. Dragons may appear any time or anywhere in the Territory, but especially show up when one is getting near something important. In other words, where you are criticizing yourself, there is treasure, and the more criticizing, the more treasure. The Critic is trying to help you, but in an attacking way; it is driven by fear.

By empathizing with the fear underneath the attacking, we can help the Critic to shift and transform into what it has been originally: a helper and protector.

Taming the Dragon starts by acknowledging it and dis-identifying from it. Then you ask it what it is afraid of, what it is not wanting, and lastly what it is wanting for you. As in Leijssen's vision the Critic is seen as an originally loving part that wants to help you.

Basically new to us was the idea of Focusing on the Critic as such. The Critic had become an opportunity of discovery!

Of special interest to us was an article by Barbara McGavin, in *The Focusing Connection*, (1994): "The 'Victim', the 'Critic' and the Inner Relationship: Focusing with the Part that Wants to Die." It's a striking report of Barbara's own journey through life. She describes how from early childhood on her life was dominated by the wanting to die and how she, even after years of Focusing, was not able to make the connection between those feelings and an internal attacking process. "For a long time I was really confused as how to recognize my Critic, even after reading the many articles in *TFC*. I didn't really hear words, my Critic didn't speak to me. After many years of Focusing, I have become aware of the signs of being under attack. It is more like recognizing the attacker's spoor" (1994, p. 4). She found what were the clearest and most reliable indicators for her in order to know that she was under attack. Since that time, these signs have her check the "undergrowth".

For McGavin, putting aside both the Critic and the feelings that it brings had not been helpful because they came back over and over again. Being identified or running away from it wasn't helpful either. What these parts really wanted from her was a 'relationship', *being with*. They needed "to be heard, sensed, allowed to say just how bad it is ..." (p. 4) and to hear that they could stay just the way they were for as long as they needed (p. 5).

Here a different type of Critic is described. Unlike other Critics, this was not a voice, but a Critic that might always be there on the background and that can be recognized only by the traces it leaves after an attack. McGavin emphasized that it is important to make a separation between 'me' and the attacking part (the 'Critic') and the part that suffers from the attack (the 'Victim'), and to build a relationship with the attacker as well as the victim.

This article brought a whole new dimension to our work with the Critic, first of all in dealing with my own one. When I started Focusing around 1984, I was aware of a Critic saying critical things to me. It took time to discover that, apart from this talking Critic, there was a different one, like McGavin's — not a voice, but a permanent overall basic feeling of being guilty. It was always there, more or less. And when sometimes it took over, I got a severe migraine attack or felt totally blocked by feelings of anxiety, anger and guilt. Whatever I did was wrong; whatever I didn't do was wrong, too. I already had gotten familiar with the background of those feelings, originating from experiences in childhood around the chronic disease of my mother who was suffering a great deal of pain. However, just knowing the origins of those feelings had not been very helpful.

The breakthrough for me came in 1996, prepared by McGavin's article and Cornell's teaching. Recognizing those attacks as a Critic's process and experiencing that I could make a separation between me and the attacking part and the part under attack (the angry and

fearful child) — that was helpful. The next step, building a relationship with both parts, took more time, and maintaining this relationship is still a challenge.

It was a big move to see how this Critic had been protecting me from a feeling, unbearable to the child, that she was doing wrong, or even worse, she was so wrong that she was not worthy of being a child of God, and thus was deserving of punishment since it was her fault that her mother fell ill and stayed ill.

This process of getting in contact with my Critic and understanding what it was trying to do brought me great relief and a remarkable decrease in headaches.

It took us time to own all the new insights and approaches we learned from others and to combine them with our own new experiences. In 1997 we brought it all together and developed a model for teaching about the Critic and the Child Within. Except for some small adaptations this is how we still are teaching.

HOW WE TEACH NOWADAYS ABOUT THE CRITIC

From the very first day of Level 1, students are taught to recognize negative critical processes. We instruct our students: whenever a Critic appears during your session, know that it has its own good reasons for showing up. It might be anxious about what could happen and wants to protect you. So let it know you know it's there; when it is saying something, let it know you hear it; thank it for its input and ask it to step aside or to stay with you in a supportive way. If that doesn't work, we guide the person in changing the focus from his or her Focusing process to the Critic and being with it in the way it needs.

On day 3 of our three-day Level 1 the whole morning is spent on the Critic. We start with an introduction (see Appendix 1) about the effects of criticizing processes in general, emphasizing their original protective function. We then discuss the difference between Inner Critic and Inner Compass. The Inner Compass is the knowing inside about what is right and true for you, the inner sense of the rightness of the direction in your life. Then an exercise follows to allow students to experience this difference (see Appendix 2). We talk about the two main types of Critics we discern: type 1 is the Critic who talks directly *at* you, criticizing your behaviour, and type 2 is the Critic who silently undermines your existence.

We emphasize the importance of getting in touch with the Critic rather than neglecting it, fighting against it, or being overwhelmed by it. By approaching the Critic with respect and openness, you can create a space to start building a new and more constructive relationship.

Critics usually aim at vulnerable spots that have to do with one's Child Within, so it is essential to have an exercise that helps students find a safe place or solid ground inside before starting the Critic exercise (see Appendix 3). After that exercise, there is time for exchange, individual sessions in the group, or whatever is wanted. In the afternoon students can continue with what came up, or what else might need attention.

On the first day of our two-day workshop on Critic and Inner Child the same program is offered, providing even more time for each part of the program. The second day is reserved for what is mostly the target of the Critic: the Child Within.

OUTCOME OF THIS WAY OF TEACHING

Teaching students to be open and alert, from the very start to the possible activity of a Critic prevents them from getting involved in unnoticed and ineffective struggles. Moreover it enhances their confidence in the Focusing process.

Surprising things happen as a result of the main exercise on the Critic. Recognizing one's Critic as 'a helper out of control' brings real relief. Identifying the originator of mental and physical distress as a Critic often comes as a true revelation: *This is my Critic, and it even wants to rescue me. I'm no longer at the mercy of this Critic — I have a choice!*

For example, an utterly correct, 42-year old secretary got ill, for three days or more, whenever there was some trivial thing she could be blamed for. Thus three or four times a year she would just lie down, not eating, not speaking, not moving inwardly or outwardly, until 'it' was gone. She had no idea about the origin of this 'illness'.

While Focusing on those 'attacks', she got an image of her mentally ill mother punishing her as a child by beating her until she didn't resist or cry any more. Then the mother stopped, startled, and asked herself, "Did I kill her?" Of course, the child believed she deserved to be punished, even if she didn't understand why. 'To die' had been the only way for the child to survive.

Later, whenever she made a mistake, the conviction of being guilty made her fall into this old pattern that once had been life saving. In the session the revelation came that now that she is an adult, her life is no longer in peril if she makes a mistake. About a year after that session she reported that not one attack had happened since.

CONCLUSION

When we started Focusing, we just sent the Critic away, not caring about its intentions or background. Nowadays, we are convinced of its basically good intentions and are interested in its antecedents and aware of its influence on the Child within us.

From the very beginning we teach our students how to recognize a Critic, and we support them in finding ways to deal with it so that it can even be transformed into an ally. Apparently this approach is a powerful tool to help students get more deeply in touch with themselves and their inner wisdom, as well as helping them to let go of anger, fear, and despair.

Largely due to this new approach of the Critic, our students are more enthusiastic and motivated to go on with Focusing classes or Focusing with a partner or on their own.

Appendix 1

INTRODUCTION IN A NUTSHELL

Our Critics, in their seemingly unchangeable ways, are working 'for our good', dutifully and ceaselessly. We can get to know them better by carefully approaching them, experiencing their fears, their drive, and their need to prevent us from 'fatal' behaviour. Critics,

while trying to protect something precious and vulnerable deep inside, may become very drastic in rescuing us.

There are clear differences between Inner Critic and Inner Compass: Critics usually make you feel small, wrong, unworthy, guilty, and bad. Following your Inner Compass, on the other hand, brings feelings of joy, relief, and strength and makes you feel that your insights and felt senses are true and right.

Critics want to pin you down to absolute patterns and judgments. Don't use *their* methods: it is better to see the Criticizing processes as either waves or undertows in the sea.

We discern two main types of Inner Critics: the ones that interfere with our *behaviour* (*You ought to, you shouldn't...*) and the ones interfering with our *very right to exist* (bringing the feeling of, *I'm no good, I'm not worthy of living...*) The latter ones often don't talk to you; they just leave you with a sudden drain of energy, a feeling of worthlessness, or worse, and imperceptibly, feeling so merged with them that you are convinced they are right.

The first type is like the waves in the sea: you can see them coming, they can smash you around — and then they are gone, until the next one comes. The other type is invisible, like the low tide stream in the sea that draws you away.

The latter type is seldom recognized as a Critic, because it can be disguised in many ways, especially in many sorts of bodily suffering. Often it is quite a revelation to discover: *This is my Critic!*

We have found that as soon as we ourselves take over the responsibilities from our Critics, they may start gaining some confidence in us and gradually release their grip.

Appendix 2

GROUP EXERCISE TO EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CRITIC AND INNER COMPASS:

Remind yourself vividly of a situation where you followed your Inner Compass. For example, you might recall having made a decision based on your inner knowing, or your feeling of 'this is true and right' while perhaps other people gave you different advice. Sense this situation. Let it come into your body and notice, 'How does it feel, all of that? In my body, in my soul?' Notice how it differs from experiencing a Critic attack.

Students then exchange in pairs or in the whole group.

Appendix 3

GROUP EXERCISE FOCUSING ON THE CRITIC

First take time to find a safe place inside.

Part 1 — Finding the Felt Sense you get from your Critic

- Remind yourself vividly of a situation where you felt criticized by your Critic or when all of a sudden you lost your energy.
- If there are more of them, choose one.
- What happens in your body and soul? Obeying? Hiding? Fighting? Shrinking?... (type 1)? Or feelings of utter worthlessness? Despair? Hopelessness? ‘Dying?’... (type 2)?
- See if there is a word, or image, or gesture to describe it.
- Make notes, draw or scribble if you want.

Part 2 — Getting to know your Critic

This time don't try to send your Critic away, but shift your attention, from your body sense of, ‘Help, I'm under attack’ to your Critic itself:

- What kind of figure is it?
- How does it approach you?
- Type 1: Does it look / sound etc. in a way you recognize (parent, teacher, etc.)?
- Type 2: In what kind of situations does it come *at* you? See if you can follow its track back, the recent one and maybe some old ones, too.
- Find a name for it—not ‘a villain’, but a name the Critic can recognize itself in, e.g. The Controller, Mrs. Particular, The Judge, the Floorer.

Part 3 — Working on the relationship with your Critic, staying in touch with your body-feel

Remember that for both types of Critic it is crucial to acknowledge that you are the one who is present and observing, so you don't completely merge with your Critic. They are there, and you — yourself — are there, too! Keep in mind that Critics must have had some good reason for getting into your life. Once they had a function — most probably a protecting one. Be open to that possibility! See if you can follow its track back, maybe to early childhood

Tips for type 1: Invite your Critic and say:

- *Hello, I'm listening. What's your message? I hear you. Is there anything more?*
- *What are you worrying or caring about? What should not happen to me or inside me? I hear you.*

- *What happened in the past that you became that... (sharp, bitter, angry etc)? No wonder!*
- *What do you want to happen to me or inside me? I hear you.*

Tip for type 2: Here, before you begin, it is important to distinguish between, *This is my Critic* and *This is Me*.

- You might sense if, underneath the present feeling, there is something even worse, something unbearable to a child that this Critic still wants to protect you from.

From here on just pick out which questions or suggestions are relevant for you:

- *Can I appreciate the watchfulness, protecting, care of my Critic, even if it's disturbing me?*
- *Whenever I get this... (uncomfortable, not-good felt sense)... can my Critic and I, in mutual respect, see together what might go wrong? And can we then together see how to cope with that?*
- Invite your body to let you sense how such cooperation with your Critic would be...

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THE IMPLICIT TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF THE BACKGROUND FEELING IN FOCUSING

Marine de Fréminville

My contribution to Focusing's evolution concerns the fuller development of the Background Feeling, a term first introduced in 1978 by Eugene Gendlin, in the first step, Clearing a Space, of his six movement model of Focusing.

I have been developing this topic for several years, presenting it to the international Focusing community for the first time in 2001, and have continued to offer this work every year up to the last 20th International Focusing Conference. This article outlines the current version of this model with some new additions, in particular, the idea of balancing the work of inner exploration with inner resourcing.

FROM CLEARING A SPACE TO BACKGROUND FEELING

Gendlin, in his *Focusing* book (1981), emphasized the value of the first of Focusing's six steps: Clearing a Space:

The first movement of focusing is enormously important because if it can happen, the rest will probably happen too. In this first movement you clear a space for yourself to live in while the rest of the focusing process is going on. The first movement is the one in which you give yourself what might be called a "positive set". You put yourself into a state of mind and body in which the other focusing movements can take place freely... like the overt actions of artists when they start to work each morning... There are many ways to approach the first movement, many different inner acts that can produce the needed positive set — or body-mind receptivity. An approach that works well for one person might produce nothing for another. Keep the one or ones that have meaning for you personally that make something good happen inside *you* (Gendlin, 1981, p. 71).

For some people, these comments still fit even if, today, there are different ways of teaching Clearing a Space (for example, Joan Klagsbrun's "Clearing a Space as a Spiritual Practice").

Later, in a short article in 1999, Gendlin highlighted the relevance of this first Focusing movement, which allows for a "much greater stress reduction" than usual methods (Gendlin, 1999, p.178). As a few certified Focusing friends have said to me, "I practice Clearing a Space because I need it." Persons who are easily overwhelmed by their feelings or who are often under pressure will find some benefits practicing Clearing a Space. In my case, discovering Focusing in Chicago in 1985, I had such a beneficial memorable experience in clearing

my space for the first time that it gave me enough confidence to trust the whole Focusing process. Upon my return, I then decided to choose Gendlin's Experiential Psychotherapy as the subject of my Master's thesis at the University of Montreal (Fréminville, 1988).

HOW GENDLIN COMES TO THE BACKGROUND FEELING

When I give a presentation on the Background Feeling, I like to share Gendlin's nuances in reference to Clearing a Space, paying attention to the change that occurs in the body and the awareness of *not identifying with the problem*.

When a problem does allow itself to be placed in a space made for it, there is a change in the body, something like a felt shift. Of course the problem is not resolved. But I believe it is very helpful first to have put a problem down, let the body live without it, then work on it... People who were able to put all or several such now-coming problems down, often remark: "Oh, I'm not the problem, I can sense myself as something different than it" (Gendlin, 1989).

Gendlin mentions another kind of experience which may occur for Focusers while Clearing a Space: "There is also a vast breadth, a big space, that comes here, which has spiritual overtones." But, if nothing like that happens, he invites us to pay attention to the *Background Feeling*: "There is often also a background feeling, some way you always feel, always gray, always a little sad, always rushing or running scared, always trying hard, always lonely, etc. Whatever your 'always-feeling' is, take that out too." And he adds: "Often it is taking this one out, and putting it down first that opens the big space" (Gendlin, 1981, p. 79).

MORE DEFINITION

This opening of the 'big space' triggered my curiosity, but I discovered that for some people it was not so easy to feel the Background Feeling or to identify it sufficiently in order to 'put it down'. To make this process easier, I began talking about the Background Feeling as *the predominant feeling you have towards life*, a phrase Elfie Hinterkopf used in her book, *Integrating Spirituality in Counseling* (1998). I explain that such predominant feelings may include a felt sense of fear or anger or heaviness or many other feelings, and that being able to set aside and then later Focus on a specific Background Feeling can transform one's life.

EXPLORING THE BACKGROUND FEELING

The following section outlines the process I use in my workshops on Background Feelings. The instructions are more like invitations or exploration guidelines presented here with some comments and examples.

The first invitation to Clear a Space is an adaptation of the short form used by Joan Klagsbrun (1999, p.163) and Mary McGuire (1999, p.181). Participants are invited to relax

and to breathe, sitting in a comfortable position, inwardly connected and grounded (feeling the feet on the floor), bringing the attention inside:

- Recall a peaceful time or a pleasant place and feel it, sensing all the good felt senses
- Notice what's between you and that feeling; acknowledge what is there without judging
- Put aside each concern that you are carrying with its global feeling, letting each be placed at a right distance and feel the difference in your body after doing that
- See if there is a 'background feeling', something you carry all the time that you may not even notice; see if you can find a word, an image for it and put it down too, if you can
- Take the time to feel if you have a clearer inner space
- Stay with this different life energy in the vast space. Enjoy this mini-vacation for a minute or so

Then, I introduce the participants to the origins of the Background Feeling, referring to the theoretical contributions made by Gendlin and Hinterkopf. I also underline that we may have some problems, difficulties, or issues that we *can* identify in order to then become *less identified* with them; we then allow ourselves to experience how we are *more* than 'that', and take the time to look at the issues from *a distance*. I offer the following invitations using the words 'Background Feeling' or 'Wallpaper', whichever term feels more accurate.

During the group process, with their eyes closed, I ask them to give me a sign with their finger if they have found one. In this way, I can keep track of what they are experiencing, adapting my invitations to what I observe is happening in the group. I then often invite the participants to write what they noticed that is important to them, especially concerning their Background Feeling.

The following is a series of proposed invitations that may be used to facilitate the exploration of the Background Feeling.

1. *After clearing your space from whatever you are carrying in your body, take the time to sense if there is something today like a Background Feeling. See if you can find a word, an image for it.*

Can you identify it? Notice what comes; notice what kind of 'always' or 'often' is there for you today: Always or often (or, a little bit) gray, heavy, sad, angry, scared, worrying, watching, lonely, small, etc. If it is not there today, you might have noticed it another time.

2. *Can you notice and feel the attitude that comes when you are present to your Background Feeling: rejection, impatience, frustration, anger, negation or tolerance, acceptance, compassion, love? Can you be friendly with it? (If your Background Feeling is recurrent, something has not been listened to and needs your presence.)*

Then there is an invitation to stay with it:

— *See if you are able to stay with it a little.*

Or, an invitation to create some distance:

— *Or, see if you wish to find some distance from it.*

There is another simple way of inviting people to find some distance:

— *If you wish to find some distance from it, see what comes if you ask yourself: How would my life be without this Background Feeling? How would my life be if it was not there? Feel what comes.*

Then I offer a special invitation which, over the years, has brought participants very interesting experiences. I invite them to go further.

3. *Feel what comes if you ask yourself: How would it be beyond this Background Feeling? (... that is so often there...)*

Participants frequently experience big shifts with this invitation. One woman saw her life in a whole new way after this experience. She met her ‘true nature’ for the first time. Beyond the apparent obstacle of her recurrent Background Feeling was the implicit light of her true self. These powerful insights are the reason I always offer this ‘*beyond*’ invitation: to allow the opening of a new door, to reach beyond, and get in touch with some implicit jewel inside us.

— *See what kind of feeling comes if you ask yourself: Who am I beyond that feeling that is always there?*

This invitation might allow someone to see beyond the apparent identity and can ‘shake up’ this ‘who’ or self with whom he or she is identified. As a participant said, “I saw myself and got a felt sense of strength and confidence inside me, but I am not used to feeling like this. What will happen if my relatives see me this way? I am afraid to lose their love.” It often happens that the emergence of the new, wonderful, fresh forward energy will need to be listened to in order to find ways to keep it from falling back into the old way of being. Gendlin, in teaching Focusing, often cautioned Focusers to receive what came and to protect it from inner critics.

4. At this point, I invite people to spend time Focusing on the Background Feeling. Sometimes it takes courage to pay attention to an uncomfortable Background Feeling. However, with Focusing we know that something ‘more’, not yet accessible, may emerge. It then becomes an interesting journey to go through the process of feeling, making space, and listening to what that *feeling in the background* has to say.

The following are a few possible invitations which may be used with a partner or alone, as needed, *according to one’s personal rhythm of exploration*: exploring, pausing, resourcing, and coming back later in keeping with the body’s ability to deal with it.

— *If it feels right to stay with this Background Feeling: Take your time to be with it, to feel it, to describe it. Feel what comes... See if it is possible to listen to what this Background Feeling that is so often there, has to say to you. See if you need something in order to be able to stay with it a little bit more...*

— *Feel what comes if you ask yourself: How would this background felt sense like me to be with it? How would this Background Feeling like me to take care of it? What is it that I have never done for it?*

If you want to go further, you can explore a possible link with something repressed:

— *See if you can feel what might have been repressed in you.*

— *Feel what comes when you ask yourself: What should have happened instead of that (the repressed something)?*

In working with the Background Feeling over the years, I discovered that its recurrence is often related to something repressed, something trying to express itself in an uncomfortable way. Gendlin proposed a brilliant question to address these reoccurrences: “When something comes from the past, or is related to childhood, we can offer this question to the felt sense: What should have happened?” He also emphasized, without any doubt: “We all have in us this blueprint of what should have happened” (Gendlin, 1991).

When he said that, a door opened for me. What should have happened in my life emerged clearly to me as if the scenario of the past was rewriting itself in a healthy healing process. All of a sudden, a felt sense of a new, fresh strength emerged bringing with it a clear knowledge of the right way of being, and transforming old, repressed family situations into life-giving images. For example, an authoritarian, threatening father became a welcoming, safe ally. This experience is very interesting because as a therapist I am often confronted with the recurrence of old wounds, listening to them with empathy, giving inner compassion, but somewhere staying with ‘unfinished business’, as we often say in psychotherapy. The “what should have happened” offered by Gendlin, allowed me to walk on a path of completion accessing an intact knowledge which was always dwelling within.

5. Another interesting exploration comes from the field of ‘vicarious traumatization’ (also called ‘secondary trauma’). I found a most powerful resource in Shirley Turcotte’s precious contribution which comes from her vast experience of working with trauma (Turcotte and Poonwassie, 2004). Sometimes when facing a strong recurrent Background Feeling, whose reoccurrence may not only be puzzling but even shaming, it may be very appropriate to ask:

— *Is there something in this Background Feeling that does not belong to me? Something that I might have absorbed from my environment (from family, from my personal, historical, geographical, or trans-generational environment)? Acknowledge whatever emerges.*

Turcotte said that 50% of her clients were dealing with vicarious traumatization! This means that they were absorbing many things from their environment: parents, relatives, etc. Hearing those words, I felt something like high voltage electricity moving up my spine, as if my body immediately knew the truth of it! My mind could not explain it. Why, as a French woman without major known trauma, would I experience such an intense reaction? It took a few Focusing explorations for me to discover what I had absorbed from familial, historical and geographical environments. For example, I was brought back to fully sense in my body my mother’s very painful loss of her first newborn infant; I felt trapped in my father’s insistent wish that I behave like my ancestor who took care of Marie-Antoinette’s children

during the French Revolution; and, living in a heavily charged historical area in France, I physically carried some memories of the atrocities that happened in the period following the Revolution, known as ‘The Terror’ (1793-94). It then becomes very appropriate to go through a mourning process, grieving gently what was absorbed unconsciously and kept inside us for so long! (There is no need to research one’s entire family history in order to explore a Background Feeling. Our body wisdom will call our attention to what it needs to know and process.)

You might also ask the body another interesting question:

— *Does my body know that the traumatic situation is over?* This may bring such relief!

Checking with the body to make sure that it knows that *it is over* can make a huge impact on the person who has been carrying the trauma for so long. It is one thing to know rationally that the traumatic situation belongs to the past, and another situation entirely, to let the body feel and acknowledge this reality. Taking the time to do so can alleviate the burden of this past feeling, unblocking and allowing the emergence of a fresh life-forward energy that has been waiting to be brought up to the present time.

6. The Background Feeling exploration may be completed with a seemingly elementary question, so obvious that we might forget to ask it. While holding the background image or felt sense, we may ask:

— *Did something like that concretely happen in my life?* For example: “I again feel something like a fear of being... (squashed or crushed)... Did something like that happen to me?”

When I asked my body the preceding question, a memory came back to me: a large cupboard fell on my back a long time ago! The body often keeps inside the feelings of some forgotten traumatic event that now needs to be acknowledged and listened to with a very gentle caring presence.

7. Last but not least, there is great value in spending time with a good or comfortable Background Feeling. Clearing a Space and exploring an uncomfortable Background Feeling might give us access to an unexpected and powerful positive feeling in the background: the source of love in us, a sense of belonging to a bigger world, feeling confident, strong, at home, creative, faithful, unified or connected, a sense of bliss...

— So whatever your comfortable Background Feeling is, take the time to feel it, to welcome it, to sense its qualities, and to thank it for coming. You may want to spend more time with it, resourcing yourself with its energy. Finally you may be interested in feeling how you might give it more space in your life.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the Background Feeling, beyond old conditionings, hidden identities, wounds and traumas, may gradually transform what was first felt as a burden or a limit into an expansion of being. This work may become a special door giving us access to what

was implicitly there: our true self, our true nature or true identity. With very gentle attitudes and much patience, we may find ourselves connecting or reconnecting with our essence.

Many of us do not even know that the body carries unknown Background Feelings that can be identified, placed at some distance and listened to. For some people, there is a tendency to ‘escape’ from *feeling* the Background Feeling, often through addictive behaviors (food, TV, alcohol, cigarettes, telephone, work, etc.) that act as a cover-up. However, knowing that there may be a hidden ‘gift’ within an uncomfortable, recurrent Background Feeling, we may be encouraged to explore it, gently and patiently healing the repressed source of these addictions, finding peace inside.

THE BACKGROUND FEELING WORK SPREADS AROUND THE WORLD

Over the years, Focusing colleagues have been inspired by this work and have written about it in several languages. Kumie Osako from Japan, after the 15th International Focusing Conference in Germany (2003), shared her discoveries in working with the Background Feeling at a Focusing Network Meeting in Tokyo, and later wrote about it for “The Focusing Network News”. Isabel Gascon from Spain has been the first to write a complete chapter on the Background Feeling, published in *Manual practico del focusing de Gendlin* (Alemany, 2007), where she invites readers to work on it with sensitivity and delicacy.

BALANCING THIS DEEP WORK WITH INNER RESOURCES ALONG THE PROCESS

Over the years, it is becoming clearer that exploring the Background Feeling is ‘deep work’. Inspired by Gendlin and my colleagues, I realize that *exploring our inner felt world may be more beneficial when balanced with some inner resources*. In my most recent Background Feeling workshops, I now choose a Clearing a Space form which includes the evocation of a ‘pleasant time or place’ as a resourcing moment. This invitation is offered at the very beginning of the Clearing a Space exercise.

As a second resource, I use the Rumi poem, “The Guest House”, as suggested by Nina Joy Lawrence based on her teaching experience in Afghanistan. It is a simple exercise that invites Focusers to find a ‘safe place inside’.

I am now developing another component in my workshops, a third resource which invites participants to call on the people who have helped them through difficult life situations, or to notice any life support manifestations, such as unexpected events or ‘gifts’ which might have arrived so appropriately on their life paths. This last addition, based on Robert Lee’s “Get Help” exercise from his “Changing the Unchangeable” workshops, provides participants with positive resources to balance the depth of their Background Feeling exploration.

Finally I want to share a process model-like experience: *writing about the Background Feeling becomes itself an instance of working with the Background Feeling*. While I needed to give company to all the feelings which arose in writing this article, my body

invited me to be coherent and congruent to what I was writing, compelling me to use my own Focusing tools along the way. Unexpectedly, I was able to experience the gift of a comfortable Background Feeling that held within it a life-forward moving energy.

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INNER RELATIONSHIP FOCUSING

Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin

Inner Relationship Focusing (IRF) is a process for emotional healing and accessing positive life-forward energy. It has been developed by Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin primarily out of their own practice, based on the Focusing work of Eugene Gendlin, with some influences from a number of other methods (Cornell and McGavin, 2002). Above all, the practice of IRF has been developed over 18 years of intensive work with clients who were engaging with difficult issues such as action blocks, addiction (primarily eating disorders), depressed and anxious states, and experiences of low self-worth. In addition to these types of issues, IRF has been developed with people who wanted to make decisions that were appropriate for them and to feel more confident in their own inner sense of rightness about their next life-forward steps. Despite its application to difficult life issues, IRF is not a method that is aimed at particular problem areas, but is adaptable to any issue that a client has, including relationship issues and even the suffering caused by pain and physical symptoms.

Like the Focusing method from which it emerges, IRF can be taught to people as a self-growth skill and can be done in pairs in a ‘peer counseling’ format. Networks of people doing IRF with each other in ‘Focusing partnership’ have arisen in a number of places in the world, and since the process can be done by telephone, partners do not need to be in the same physical location in order to work with each other. Professionally, IRF can be used by therapists, counselors, and other healing professionals in conjunction with other modalities, and it can also be done as a stand-alone practice by an ‘IRF Guide.’

One of the most striking applications of IRF is how it is being taught in Afghanistan and Pakistan by Dr. Pat Omidian and her students, supported by Nina Joy Lawrence, in a community-health model.

CORE CONCEPTS

The central concept of IRF is ‘Self-in-Presence.’ *Presence* is the natural state of the Self: calm, curious, interested, and able to act in mature and balanced ways. The client is understood to be capable of being Self-in-Presence, even when that is not his or her experience of him/herself. The practitioner speaks to the client from this assumption, and may also offer suggestions that strengthen and support the client’s experience of Self-in-Presence.

Within the inner relational space thus created, felt experiences appear that are in need of the comfort, support, compassion, and empathic listening of Self-in-Presence. The role of the practitioner is to support the client in offering these qualities to the partial-self experience that is in need of them. So the primary relationship is the ‘inner relationship’ within the client, and the relationship between the practitioner and the client supports this inner relationship (see Gendlin 1984).

The IRF practitioner is particularly attentive to the possibility of the client being (or becoming) identified with partial-selves, or exiling (dissociating from) partial-selves, which precludes the experience of Self-in-Presence. The practitioner then guides the client into being Self-in-Presence with these aspects of self. This is key because when the Focuser is not Self-in-Presence, a felt sense cannot form.

Focusing is a process of exploratory attention to a felt sense. An open, relaxed, allowing quality of attention is needed for a felt sense to form. Gendlin (1996) makes the important point that a felt sense is not just any bodily sense. “A felt sense is new. It is not already there.... It *comes* freshly.... It is something you *have*, but not something you are” (p. 20, italics in original).

When what the Focuser experiences is not a felt sense, but is a bodily-felt, emotional experience which seems to demand attention, in IRF we view this as a ‘Partial-Self’ or a ‘partial-self process’. (See our article, “Treasure Maps to the Soul,” p. 41 in this volume.) Partial-Selves are repetitive reaction states that need empathic company from the Focuser as Self-in-Presence. This in turn, over time, allows a felt sense to form. Self-in-Presence is both a process of sensitive and compassionate relating to partial-selves that need attention, *and* it is the space that allows felt senses to form.

The methodology of IRF includes careful attention to language as a facilitative process. ‘Presence language’ is used when empathically responding to clients, and is sometimes taught to clients as a self-care process. The two basic components of Presence language are: “You are sensing...” and “something in you...” “You are sensing...” cultivates Self-in-Presence and supports the client in identifying with their capacity to sense their own experiencing. “Something in you...” points to an aspect of their experiencing and supports their being in relationship with it. Of course these are varied in response to the circumstances of the actual session.

A second important linguistic emphasis is the use of statements (as empathic reflections) and suggestions. Questions are almost never used. The reason is that questions are understood to be an inefficient and indirect method for facilitating a process in the client. In addition, questions can be experienced as intrusive, and can result in a shutting down of process. Questions also highlight the interpersonal dimension, when the inner dimension is the one that needs emphasis. Suggestions, on the other hand, are almost always experienced as less intrusive than questions, especially when introduced by ‘cushions’ such as “You might like to...” or “If it feels right to you, you might...” Some examples of suggestions that invite Presence are: “You might sense how it would like you to be with it,” and “See if it would be OK to just be with it.”

A third linguistic point is the preference of adjectival descriptions over nouns, to support the maximum ease of change. “Something in you which is *feeling afraid*” is preferred to “the fear,” and so on.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the quality of ‘radical acceptance’ that is offered and invited by the practitioner to all aspects of the client’s process. Notably, the experience of an ‘inner critic’ is not pushed away, but is treated as another partial-self to be

related to as Self-in-Presence. Experiences called ‘thinking’ or ‘distraction’ are also included and respected as meaningful aspects of client process. The practitioner is careful to protect the client’s process from manipulation or domination by any partial-self aspect. Experiences are understood to be present in the way that they need to be right now. The result is an overall atmosphere of respect and inner acceptance in which steps of life-forward change can easily occur.

This overview of the core concepts of IRF cannot begin to describe the extent of the supportive processes and methods that have been developed. For a more extensive treatment, see Cornell and McGavin 2002, and for even more detail on specifics, see Cornell 2008.

EXAMPLE

Several excerpts from an actual session of Inner Relationship Focusing will allow the process to be illustrated. Comments will be added *in italics* within the transcript. There are many pauses in the session. Pauses of at least 15 seconds are indicated with ellipses (...) between sentences.

The excerpts are from a session done on the telephone with a therapist interested in experiencing the Focusing process for himself. So he is having his first guided Focusing session. At the start of the session, the client said he wanted to work with a recent experience that he described as shocking. He decided not to tell the guide what the experience was. Before the excerpt begins, the client has been experiencing a strong sense of his body twisting, the lower part of the body being pulled forward and the upper part of the body pulling back and away, as if something there is saying (in the client’s words), “I don’t want to see this!”

EXCERPT #1

Client: I’m still really twisted. Except now it feels like... like I really feel the pressure on my heart. That’s almost like... like that’s the part that’s being squeezed.

Guide: So your attention moving now to your heart, and sensing that it’s feeling squeezed, and maybe the word “pressure” also fits. Just maybe checking how you would describe it there now.

C2: Yeah. And now it’s um... OK, it’s almost like, um... I begin to feel this tremendous sadness in there, in my heart, and uh— There’s a lot happening below it in the solar plexus and the belly. It’s moving a lot too. The heart just feels really sad.

G2: So just briefly acknowledging both, that there’s a lot going on below it, and with the heart, seeing if it’s OK to stay with that a while. How sad it feels.

We’ll see this invitation to “stay with that” repeated over and over again, for example at G5, G8, and G10 as well as here.

C3: Yeah. It really does.

G3: You may even— maybe you’ve already done this— maybe just want to put a gentle hand there, so like with your hand you’re saying, “Yes, I’m with you” to that place in the heart.

This invitation to “put a gentle hand there” is one of the moves that cultivate Self-in-Presence.

C4: I have my hand on it. It’s like, um -- “Yeah, I’m with you.”

G4: That’s it.

C5: It really is like the back, bottom part of me wants to go one way and the top part of me wants to go the other way. But my hand is on my heart, and what I’m most aware of is the sadness, it’s kind of radiating up to my throat. My eyes. It’s a really teary sense.

G5: Just staying with that.

C6: “I just can’t believe it. I just can’t believe it. I just can’t believe it.”

The quotation marks around the client’s words in C6 (and C7, C8, and C9) indicate our understanding that the client is actually quoting or speaking from an inner aspect, saying out loud what ‘it’ is saying internally. Notice that the guide responds, at G6 and G7, from this understanding of the client’s words.

G6: And the words are: “I just can’t believe it.”

C7: “This can’t be happening.”

G7: Yeah. Something in you says, “This can’t be happening.”

C8: “This can’t be happening. It just can’t.”

G8: And you’re staying with it.

C9: “It can’t be.” And now I feel kind of sick.

G9: So that kind of sick feeling comes now.

C10: Yeah, my stomach, bleagh.

G10: Sensing that in your stomach like a “bleagh.” So that’s here too. And also staying with that. It’s showing you something about how this shocking thing feels inside right now. “I can’t believe it.” And this sick feeling... your body shows you this “sick” reaction, and you’re staying with it with gentle curiosity.

The invitation to stay with a place with “gentle curiosity” is characteristic of IRF. See also G21.

C11: So it’s almost, I almost just had a sense of um, my body just sort of asking me, “Do you really want to know? Do you really, really want to know?” It kind of angrily asked me that, as if it were saying, “Do you really want to know? I know you don’t want to know.”

G11: As if there’s some kind of history of something in you not wanting to know.

The guide suspects the existence of a partial-self which is not being acknowledged when the Focuser finds a part that is angry at him, saying “I know you don’t want to know.” The part that is angry was not the unacknowledged part, but the fact that it was angry pointed to a relational history within the client and the possibility that a ‘part that doesn’t want to know’ was still there. This will be followed up on further at G18.

C12: Right, like “I’ve tried before.”

G12: And maybe there is something in you that doesn’t want to know... like the top half of your body... So there’s no need to say Yes or No to that question, but just to say, you’re acknowledging something in you that’s asking, “Do you really want to know?”

When a person is addressed directly by a part there is a strong tendency to respond in kind, yet responding would mean leaving Self-in-Presence and identifying with a partial-self. When the guide says “So there’s no need to say Yes or No to that question” in G12, she is supporting the client in remaining Self-in-Presence.

C13: Yeah, something in me wants to know if I want to know! Or it wants to tell me... something in me wants to tell me that it doesn’t think I want to know.

G13: Right. That’s what gets acknowledged now.

C14: It’s not happy about it. It’s afraid to think — It’s afraid to hope that maybe I’ll want to know. It doesn’t want to hope that.

G14: Oh! So there’s been some kind of past history where it’s been disappointed perhaps.

C15: Right, exactly.

G15: And now it’s angry. And you’re sensing that it would like to hope that you’d want to know, but...

C16: Yeah, it really would, it would like to hope, but it’s given up. It’s like a teenager, “You know how Mom is.”

G16: “Whatever.”

C17: “Whatever.” Yeah, exactly. “Whatever.”

G17: But underneath that, there’s a hope.

C18: It would love it if it could dare to believe that... Like it wants me to say, “I really want to know, tell me, I really really do.” And it would probably say, “No you don’t.” “No, I really do!” So it’s like that.

G18: So probably what needs to happen is to really acknowledge the part of you that doesn’t want to know. We think that’s probably still around here somewhere.

C19: Yeah.

G19: So that you’re turning toward that part that doesn’t want to know as well, including that also.

Notice this relational language, how the guide supports the client in “turning toward” and “including” this part.

- C20: That’s really interesting, because that’s the part I wouldn’t... I wouldn’t be proud of not wanting to know something. I would fancy myself someone who would want to know things.
- G20: So it’s harder to acknowledge that that’s there.
- C21: But it **is** there.
- G21: And yet if you pause and acknowledge, you can feel that it is. Just saying, “Hello I know you’re there too,” to something — And that’s something also to be curious about. We don’t know yet what’s really going on for the one that doesn’t want to know. So for now, just hello.
- C22: That feels really good. That felt *really* good. A lot of relief.
- G22: Good, take time to have that relief feeling, let it be there.

EXCERPT #2

The next excerpt begins just a little later in the same session.

- C23: I want to find the part... It’s like now I’m kind of curious to make contact with the part that doesn’t want to know.
- G23: So just letting your awareness be in your body. Feeling the support of the floor, and especially sensing in that middle area, in that throat, chest, stomach area. It could be anywhere though. And just saying, “I’d like to get to know better the one that doesn’t want to know,” and wait.
- C24: I hear that, and it feels really good to know that it’s OK to wait. And I’m going to wait a while.
- G24: Yeah.
- C25: It’s a little suspicious still. It’s kind of saying, “Yeah, I’ve heard that before.”
- In order to know that “it” is suspicious, the client has to be sensing it. This is what the guide picks up on to affirm in G25 and G26.*
- G25: So it sounds like you’re already sensing it. That’s really great.
- C26: Yeah, I’m sensing it.
- G26: It’s already communicating with you. And what it’s saying right now is that, “Yeah, it’s heard that before.” And letting it know you hear that.
- C27: It’s not trusting.
- G27: And you’re hearing it’s not trusting.

Notice the contrast between saying back “It’s not trusting,” a simple reflection, and what we show here: “And you’re hearing it’s not trusting,” which is Presence Language.

The guide hears and supports the whole relationship, between “you” and “it,” and implicitly reminds the client of his role: to hear that place inside.

C28: I hear that.

G28: Very good, yeah.

C29: You know it’s saying, um— It’s funny, it really is just like a teenager. It’s saying, “If you knew what it was, you wouldn’t even be thinking about wanting to know.” And so I’m saying to it, “I hear you think it’s so overwhelming...” ... I just want to ask it again, you know, “Whenever you’re comfortable, I wonder if you would just let me know where you are.” ... It’s like... what comes is sort of a tightening around the mouth, you know, kind of like “urggh.” Kind of like pursing your lips, like “You can’t drag...”

G29: So what it’s showing you is that tightening the mouth, pursing the lips...

Notice that “what it’s showing you is...” is another form of Presence language. Contrast with a reflection without that phrase, for example: “What comes is a tightening of the mouth, pursing the lips...” What the phrase with Presence language adds is the explicit relational dimension, and supports the client to stay as Self-in-Presence.

C30: It really really wants to tell me! I can just feel how much it wants to tell me.

G30: Yeah, so it really wants—

C31: It wants the relief of telling me, but— (laughs) It’s exactly like people are.

G31: Yeah, so it wants the relief, and it also wants to be sure there’s a safe reception.

C32: Yeah. It kind of wants to punish me for not— it wants to punish me.

G32: Yeah, it doesn’t want you to have it easy now.

C33: No, because I have— It thinks it’s my fault. Yeah, it does, it thinks it’s my fault. So I’m thinking, this is about... I’m thinking about being born. It’s like this part is sort of saying, “This is your fault, that we were born. This really shouldn’t have happened.” I don’t know why that came up but it did.

We would like to point out several interesting features in C33. First, although the client says twice “I’m thinking,” this is clearly not what is usually called thinking. It is more like the coming of a further piece of the process. The guide ignores the word “thinking,” and treats the segment as if the client had said “sensing.” Second, what comes is not logical in the usual sense. Nothing in the session so far is about being born. This is a good sign! The guide has no idea where this birth theme comes from or how it makes sense. Very importantly, the guide does not worry about not understanding. To protect the coming of this new piece, the guide will be trying to make sure the client also doesn’t worry about trying to understand the logic of this yet. So when the client says, “I don’t know why that came up but it did,” the guide takes that as a signal to invite the client to check with the place if what came fits for it. This directs the process away from trying to understand and back to sensing within.

G33: Well, maybe check with it if that's right, that it's like it's saying, "This is your fault that we're born."

C34: Yeah, it's saying, "Yeah, you got us into this mess. You got us born. We don't want to be born."

G34: So just let it know you hear that.

Invitations like the one in G34, which you will hear often in this session, are a key part of IRF, because they complete the sequence of awareness, supporting the client in hearing what the partial-self is saying, seeing what it is showing, sensing what it is feeling, etc. Importantly also, this kind of invitation protects the process from something less facilitative happening, like analyzing or responding in a 'helpful' way.

C35: OK. "I hear that you didn't want to be born, that you think I made you be born. I hear that you're still really afraid. Tell me what it is that happened." ... I'm just waiting now, and I want to say, I want to say I need some help. I don't know where you'd care to go but I feel kind of stuck.

We appreciate that the client felt relaxed and trusting enough to ask the guide for a process suggestion in C35.

G35: Well, you know, it sounds to me like a time when waiting can be really valuable. So I wonder if there is a part that's impatient or has trouble believing that it'll be OK just to stay with this.

The guide suspects that the client's inability to wait (less than 20 seconds had passed) is connected to being identified with an impatient partial-self. This could also be inferred from the client's saying, "Tell me what it is that happened," which is not pure empathy. It was spoken very kindly... but it could be experienced by a partial-self as rather pushy.

C36: Yeah, there is that part.

G36: Yeah, so we're saying Hello to that too.

C37: Back to just being.

G37: So back to just being, and trusting that, you know, what's needed here is for trust to be built. And trust takes time. Just being.

C38: [one minute silence] There's a... yeah there's a voice in there that truly doesn't trust, doesn't believe that— There's a voice in there that's almost mocking, and it's saying, "Ha, ha, see this doesn't change anything."

G38: Yeah, you're really sensing how deeply untrusting it is.

It's great that after a silence of as long as one minute, the client does begin to sense more from the part's point of view. The guide sees her job here (G38 and beyond) as gently holding the client in an inwardly empathic stance.

C39: Oh, totally. It doesn't trust that healing ever comes. Ever. No matter what.

G39: So just giving it your empathy for how that is for it, to not trust that healing ever comes.

C40: It's like the one that doesn't want to talk. It doesn't believe I can hear it. It wants to believe that healing comes. But it just can't. It just can't. "If you believed that and you were disappointed, it would be terrible."

G40: So yeah, wow, it's really letting you know a lot!

C41: Yeah, it is.

G41: It's letting you know it's not wanting to be disappointed. That being disappointed would be terrible. And maybe just give it empathy for that, compassion for that, no wonder.

Another key process in IRF is 'not wanting.' The guide is alert to hear when the process begins to express what is not wanted. There was no need to invite it explicitly. From the close quality of empathy that the client had been offering, the not wanting naturally began to emerge at C40. At G41, the guide reflects using the phrase "not wanting," to emphasize what is being heard. And as we see in C42, that brings a shift. Once the "not wanting" of a partial-self is heard, sensing its protective nature often follows. C42 is a great example of this. This partial-self process has gone from mocking at C38 to being protective at C42.

C42: That's another big relief, it's like it knows that— It's saying, you know, "I'd be crushed. Oh, my god, I'd be crushed." And now it's saying, "Well, you know, if I—" Kind of back to being born, again. Like if I really believed that life was really good, that would be *awful*. You would just be completely crushed when you lost it, or when— you know, to really believe it was safe to love somebody, that would be awful if you lost it. "I can't let that happen. And I can't let that happen to *you*," it's sort of saying.

G42: Wow. It's wanting to protect you from that crushing, awful loss!

C43: Yeah, me and itself. It definitely wants to protect me, it's definitely— it's still kind of... You know, it's saying all this in a kind of snappy way, but there's a lot there.

G43: You can feel, underneath that snappy quality there's this other quality of not wanting to be crushed, and not wanting you to be crushed.

C44: I can definitely feel that. It doesn't want me to believe in life, it doesn't want me to trust life, it doesn't want me to do that because it would be awful.

G44: It really wants you to hold back from trusting in life, believing in life, because it doesn't want the crushing disappointment that would come then, when you discovered life isn't trustworthy.

C45: Yes, that's it.

G45: Just give it your empathy for that, "Yes, I really hear you."

C46: "I really hear that you really don't want to be crushed, and you really don't want me to be crushed, I really hear that." And now it's mad, and it's saying, "Well, then how come you keep acting like it's possible to have a good life? How come you keep trying?"

G46: So let it know you sense how mad it is.

Without the guide's support to stay with empathy, at G46, the client might have felt like responding to the part, since he is being directly challenged. We don't want this to happen, since it would mean falling out of Self-in-Presence and into a stuck, old argument. Just a gentle suggestion at G46 keeps that from happening. G47 is also this type of invitation.

C47: Yeah I do. "I sense how mad you are, how frustrated, how much it hurts when I keep trying." Yeah, it just says, Yeah. It's like the more space I give it, the madder it gets. It's like a teenager. It says, "You're a fool, you're just a complete fool. You're never going to learn."

G47: And that's how worried it is. To the point— to the extent that it's saying things like "You're never going to learn." It's showing you that's how worried it is.

C48: "So you're worried that I'm never going to learn. You're really sure that we're going to be in this predicament forever." I want to get in better touch with that part. ... It's kind of in my throat. It wants me to touch it. ... It's afraid that I'm going to try to make it believe in life. So I have to tell it, "No, really, I'm not. It's really good to have you there, not believing in life." I don't believe that, though.

G49: So just saying to it, I really hear you don't want to be made or forced to be different than how you are.

C50: Yeah, that's good. "I really hear that you just don't want to be forced to be other than how you are. I really hear that. You don't want to be forced to believe in something." It really liked that. It asked me, "Could you say that again?" "You don't want to be— You don't—"

G50: "I really hear, you don't want to be forced to believe in something."

C51: "I really hear, I totally hear, you really don't want to be forced to believe in something." ... "I want you to know I'm not going to force you to believe in something. I'm not going to force you at all. I don't believe in forcing, I'm not going to force you." ... Boy, there's a lot in that, forcing me to believe in something.

G51: You're really sensing how much there is in that.

C52: Yeah, there's a lot. There's a lot, a lot, a lot. "Don't force me to believe in something. Don't force me." OK, now that started a whole new... There's a definite change in scene. From there it goes like really deep, deep in my abdomen, and there's like— This is really weird. There's like a pulsing that starts almost down in my sacrum and it goes all the way up to my— around my navel, and it's expanding... Wow, it's weird.

G52: Take your time. It gets to be surprising if it needs to be.

The guide assumes that when the client calls this experience "weird," he is expressing surprise at how different and unexpected and hard to describe it is, rather than being critical. This was in the voice tone.

C53: Yeah. All right, so—

G53: And you're feeling it like a pulsing.

- C54: Yeah, and as I said that, I— I'm kind of spasming, I mean I literally am, I mean the muscles, it doesn't hurt, but it's kind of shifting around down there. It's... wow. Now I want to sort of walk around.
- G54: OK.
- C55: OK now it's like, there's that pulsing and now it's kind of— I wish I could explain this... This is a really hard one to talk about... It's like... Oh, man!
- G55: Just to let you know that in Focusing we like when things are hard to describe.
- C56: All right, well, that's good!
- G56: So if you're at the edge of something that's not easy to describe, it's fabulous, it just means you're in the right place.
- C57: All right, so here, this is it. It's like, uh... It's like there's my sacrum at one end, and there's my, um... whatever the other end is up there, the base of the skull, and throat, and it's as if... there's like a pulse in it, but it's very very very low, I mean low-pitched, like it were under water. Like it were way under the ocean. And it's like, "Boom!" You can't hear it, but if it were a sound, it would be like a "Boom."
- G57: Like a deep, deep boom. Yeah.
- C58: My brain is trying to figure out how we got there from before, but that's not important.
- G58: It's when that place really felt you weren't going to force it.
- C59: That's right! That's right, exactly!
- G59: That's what came right before this shift of attention.
- C60: That's true.
- G60: So now what we have is this deep pulse, this deep, slow pulse.
- C61: ... I'm going to have to sit with this.
- G61: You're staying with it. It's fine. Take your time.
- C62: ... Hm. OK, now there's something in my... just below my navel. It feels like this incredible joy, just like— I just want to laugh. Cry and laugh. It's not quite coming out, but it almost feels like it could, like... I can really feel that.
- G62: Letting that be there as fully as it wants to be. Something like incredible joy. Yeah.
- C63: Like my body is just dropping into this... this real ease.

CONCLUSION

Inner Relationship Focusing gives a high priority to the relationship of the Focuser to 'something'—the inwardly felt experience. The inner relationship is one of sensing, describing, empathy, and compassion. The role of the practitioner, guide, or Focusing partner is to support this inner relationship.

Gendlin writes of the inner relationship (1990, p. 216): “The client and I, we are going to keep it, in there, company. As you would keep a scared child company. You would not push on it, or argue with it, or pick it up, because it is too sore, too scared or tense. You would just sit there, quietly.” And also: “Focusing is this very deliberate thing where an ‘I’ is attending to an ‘it’” (p. 222).

This “it” which Gendlin speaks of can be either a partial-self experience (as in the first quote cited) or a felt sense. There is a key distinction theoretically between these two different kinds of process, although in practice, in an actual session, they may merge and blend in a synergistic way.

A partial-self process is a repetitive reaction state. IRF has developed many processes that help Focusers to provide the empathic relationship that Partial-Selves need.

A felt sense is a freshly arising sense of the whole of something (a situation, a person, a partial-self). It needs direct, impartial, open, sustained awareness which is different from our ‘ordinary’ states of awareness. The cultivation of Self-in-Presence is a crucial element in the forming of this unusual state of awareness.

It is not necessary to know which or what kind of experience the Focuser is having, in order to invite a process of being Self-in-Presence with it. Supporting the Focuser in being Self-in-Presence with their felt experience will illuminate and carry forward whatever process needs to happen at that point—either being with a partial-self or having and symbolizing a felt sense. The biggest obstacle to felt sensing is identification with emotional reactions (i.e. partial-selves). These identifications can be subtle and potentially difficult to become aware of; for example, when a Focuser says, “It’s clear I just need to get over this,” or “This is a weak part of me,” a sensitive listener can hear that this person has slipped away from Self-in-Presence into identification with another partial-self.

At any point, while being with partial-selves in an empathic way, the sense of the whole situation can emerge. IRF enables a process of relating to these aspects demanding attention, and at the same time keep holding/expanding the space where a felt sense can form. It is from the forming of and sensing into the felt sense of the whole situation that fresh steps of carrying forward can emerge.

We are profoundly grateful to Eugene Gendlin for his life’s work, the philosophy of the implicit, and for his generous encouragement of us, his students, to find our own carrying forward which could not have happened without him.

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A SEVENTH MOVEMENT: ACTION STEP AND 'FOCUSING ON THE GO'

Atsmaout Perlstein, Ph.D. and Bilha Frolinger, M.A.

ABSTRACT

In the past decade, Eugene Gendlin has emphasized the importance of bringing an action step to the Focusing Process. According to Gendlin the Focusing process without an action step is like a car with its motor running, but not moving.

In the year 2000, when we co-founded the Israeli Focusing Center, we added a seventh movement called an *Action Step* right after completing the step of *Receiving*. This Action Step was also added as a response to the Israeli participants' special cultural demands to learn a process that is applicable in the here and now, and effective in handling daily stressful events.

In addition, our teaching program also consists of a special unit called: 'Focusing on the Go'. This unit attempts to weave Focusing into the public language and daily conversations in order to integrate Focusing as a way of being and living.

Our Israeli participants' self-reports of personal changes and inner transformation have supported the value of introducing a seventh movement as Action Step and 'Focusing on the Go'.

INTRODUCTION

Eugene Gendlin speaks of Focusing as a "potential for a new kind of a relationship and a new kind of society, transcending outmoded roles and patterns... a society of new pattern-makers" (Gendlin, 2007).

We have been inspired and influenced by Gendlin's vision of this new society and looked for ways to make this vision tangible and applicable for everyday life in a society living in a survival mode.

Israelis are known to be eager to learn new processes to increase quality of living in the 'here and now', and to deal with their life stressors more effectively. They request that these processes be efficient, applicable, and useful in life. Many of our early participants expressed different frustrations after practicing Focusing such as, "*O.K., I just focused, but what is the next step? or How can my inner shift help me tomorrow in my job? or What can I do to manage my anger toward my boss at work?*"

From the participants' point of view there is paramount value in experiencing a full Focusing process: the physical shifts and the insights, and yet they were looking for the 'more' that they could do *in addition* to the inner process.

Traditionally, the Focusing process consists of inner movements, but the challenge we faced was how to further extend those inner movements and insights and anchor them

in the outer reality so they could be easily and effectively applied in real life situations. The importance of not stopping with inner movements and shifts in experiencing was noted by Gendlin several years after his original publication of the Six Steps. He stated that, "Steps of Focusing and steps of outward action often alternate. Each aids the other" (Gendlin, 2007).

As a result, we have been teaching Focusing along two tracks side by side. One track is the traditional Focusing Process with the six movements as a self-process and in partnerships. The second track has to do with two new developments that we have implemented in our teaching. The first one is a seventh movement called Action Step that is offered after the Receiving step, and the second one is 'Focusing on the Go' which provides an opportunity to incorporate and weave Focusing into daily language, so that it stands out as a new way of thinking and speaking.

1. Seventh Movement: Action Step

In our model, after the Receiving movement (in which the Focuser purposefully gives thanks and acknowledgement for whatever steps or movement occurred), we added a seventh movement, Action Step, that takes Focusing to yet another level of practice and application in daily living. Now, a Focuser is not only rewarded with a felt shift during a Focusing process in his or her inner world, but also can be rewarded in the outer relationship world by applying and practicing one or more small action steps.

We have seen a whole set of new possibilities open up to the Focusers whenever they do a seventh movement, the Action Step. Once they choose the action step and make a verbal commitment to doing it the following week, they often experience new *felt senses*. It is through the body's *sense of meaning* that a person can experience shifts and changes in relationship to an issue. By practicing one or more action steps in the external world, a new interactive process happens between the Focuser and the event — or another person. This interaction with the environment implies new different steps and new shifts.

LEADING INTO A SEVENTH MOVEMENT: ACTION STEP

At the end of the Focusing process, after the Receiving movement, the Listener invites the Focuser to take the seventh movement: "*Please, take a moment and sit quietly with **all** that came for you in your Focusing process... and ask yourself: What is a meaningful small action step(s) that you would like to anchor and practice this coming week?*" *The Focuser finds one or more action steps and resonates the step(s).*

S/he invites the body wisdom to provide a body felt sense to the possibility of applying the action step(s). The Focuser has an opportunity to do a mental rehearsal, right then and there, and experience the Listener's reflective response.

For example: Judith just finished a full Focusing process regarding her relationship with her 20 year old daughter. She acknowledged her inability to feel close and loving toward her daughter. At the end of the Receiving step, she sat quietly with both her pain and her stuck place. After she opened her eyes and was back from her inner journey, she was offered a seventh movement — the Action Step. The Listener asked Judith, "*Please consider the*

whole process that you just completed and ask what is the one small action step that you want to anchor and be committed to this coming week?" Judith was quiet for a long moment and then said, "I know it is going to be difficult to do...but I would like to initiate a dinner with my daughter." Her statement was followed with an excitement and a big smile as if she could not wait to move forward with her action step. The Listener reflected her excitement, which brought Judith to say, "I am going to make the invitation tomorrow morning." A week later she reported to the group how important that dinner was for her and her daughter, who responded very positively to their reconnection. We believe that offering a seventh movement of Action Step forms a loop between the person's inner space and outer reality. This loop coincides with Gendlin's perception of the body as an organism that exists in a constant ongoingness with the environment where one feeds and nurtures the other.

Another example: A Focuser ended a process regarding her inability to function at work because of her critical boss. In her Focusing process she found places of fear and vulnerability. After the dialogue and the Receiving movements, she was instructed to find one Action Step that she could practice the following week. When she sat with all that came up for her during the Focusing process, she stated that she would like to practice looking directly at her boss when he criticizes her, rather than looking away from him. The following week she happily reported to the group that after few days of practice, she was finally able to look at her boss even as he was critiquing her performance. As a result her inner place of fear was greatly reduced.

2. 'Focusing on the Go'

We define 'Focusing on the Go' as the ability of a Focuser to introduce one or several steps of the Focusing process, as needed, without going into a full inner process when encountering different events or people on a daily basis.

Our vision is that Focusing invitations and guiding suggestions become an integral part of our daily conversations. As such, our Focusers are encouraged to use Focusing language in their daily encounters in the office, on the street, at lunch or over coffee. They are requested to use metaphors and images when they tell their stories and dip into their inner experience to share the subjective intricacies of their felt sense. They are also supported in offering Focusing invitations and guiding as part of the flow of their social conversations to facilitate stories and new meanings.

Examples:

Josh is a 5 years old boy who barged into the house very angry. His mother looked at him and reflected, "Oh...I see a *big* anger...is your anger as big as this...? (illustrating with her hands in front of her body the size of a tennis ball) or... is your anger a lot bigger...? (illustrating with her hands in front of her body the size of a basketball). Josh pointed out to her second hand's motion and then collapsed into her arms crying.

Sarah is a perfectionist and finds herself overwhelmed with her work. She was taught to do 'Focusing on the Go': she learned to scan her body often to identify physical signs of

overwhelming experiences. Once she identified them she was taught to establish a right distance from the trigger(s) mentally and/or physically. Though, she does not yet know how to do a full Focusing process, she learned how to better manage her overwhelming feelings.

Rachael, an organizational advisor who knows Focusing, was waiting for her weekly meeting with a client who is the head of the Children's Program at the university. The client, Ronit, came into the room carrying a lot of anger and speaking in an unusually loud voice. Rachael listened and then said gently, *"I really hear how much anger and frustration is there for you, right now...."* and invited her to continue. Ronit spilled out a long explanation of what had happened in her previous meeting.

Rachel could see a positive change in Ronit's expression, just through the simple process of listening to her with an open heart. Then she said to Ronit, *"See if you can find a place to put that anger and frustration for just a little while ...and let me know when it feels right to start our meeting?"* Ronit became silent for awhile. Rachael waited quietly with her. Then, in a few minutes, Ronit took a long breath, smiled, and said, *"Thank you, I am ready now to start our meeting."*

A teenager came back from a trip of mountain climbing with his youth group. He looked excited and tired, but was silent, unable or unwilling to converse with his mother about it. His mother who is a skillful Focuser started the dialogue by describing how he looked to her. She said, *"You look like a person who just finished a job he would never want to do again..."* Her image of him as upset and angry jolted him, and he immediately stated, *"You totally missed it, Mom. My experience was great; it felt like I won a gold medal in the Olympics!"* to which his mother responded, *"Wow, that does sound great!"*

The mother, like all of our students, practiced what she was taught in our 'Focusing on the Go' unit. When Focusers-on-the-Go interact with someone at home or on the street who may have difficulty communicating feelings, they can first speak of an image found in their own body's felt sense, or alternatively, speak of an image they 'sense' in the silent person. Thus, Focusers-on-the-Go initiate conversations by first becoming aware of their own inner felt-senses to the situation and then casually sharing them. Often, those who were silent, respond from within — either accepting, modifying or rejecting the images, and/or come up with an original image.

Hopefully, in the above examples, we have demonstrated how Focusing language and one or several steps of the process, can be used and adapted in order to facilitate a direct connection with one's own bodily felt sense.

'FOCUSING ON THE GO' AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

The Focusing process is powerful and effective for experiencing felt shifts with negative feelings, as well as a powerful and effective tool for integrating positive experiences in our body memory.

General knowledge suggests that the body remembers and harbors negative feelings for many years, and at the same time often tends to screen out or not register positive experiences. For example, many people seem to reject or minimize compliments that are given

to them by their friends and/or have difficulty remembering good times in the face of bad events. We believe that people need to have *intention* and become *action oriented* in both outer and inner reality, in order to identify positive experiences and not let them pass by. Research on positive psychology suggests that when people open their hearts to constructive ideas, they will feel more fulfilled, more connected, and happier (Ben-Shahar, 2007). Therefore, we teach our Focusers to be on the watch for positive feelings and events, and do 'Focusing on the Go' as an initial step by first: identifying the positive event, second: giving it an image, and third: inviting the body to open up and breathe in the good/hopeful feeling. Later, one may choose to do a full Focusing process to explore the implicit meaning within the positive experience.

At the end of this positive-feeling Focusing process, the Focuser is again invited to take a seventh movement to further anchor a small action step in reality. In this way, an ongoing stream of positive experiences is present and circulated in one's body.

Examples: As Mary stood in the line to pay her groceries, the cashier gave her a huge, warm smile that she felt in her heart. Instead of hurrying past the moment or dismissing its impact, she remembered to pay attention and to stay with the good feeling, identifying it, giving it an image, and breathing it in to expand into her bodily felt sense. The warm feeling then spread throughout her whole body by the time she was out of the store. Mary was thankful for this fresh and high energy that helped her connect more deeply with others throughout the day.

David was known to always see the 'glass half empty'. In our Focusing class, he learned to scan his physical body and pay attention to the inner impact of positive events around him. He began to scan his body during a friend's hug to detect his body's subtle reactions. By learning to 'Pause' and keep a curious and interested attitude, he could then talk to himself as if he were his own best friend, "Give yourself a chance to experience something good! This is about the 'half *full* glass'. You can do it, David!..your life deserves to have positive experiences."

'FOCUSING ON THE GO' AND CLEARING A SPACE

Eugene Gendlin refers to Clearing a Space as, "The first movement of Focusing which is enormously important: You can think of Clearing a Space as a brief time when you allow yourself to stop being a monument to your troubles" (p.81). This process involves establishing "friendly" inner relationships with yourself that includes safety, listening, and empathic presence with whatever issues or concerns might arise.

Initially, we teach our students Clearing a Space in the traditional way as a first movement in a Focusing session. We then also integrate it into our seventh movement of Action Step in Focusing, meaning that one can use Clearing a Space independent of the full Focusing process, repeat it as many times as one wishes, and apply it in different situations for different purposes.

Susan is a Focuser who met her friend Rebecca for dinner. Rebecca looked bothered and heavy. Susan took the napkin on the table and asked Rebecca, "May I ask you a ques-

tion?" (Rebecca nodded, *yes*.) "If this napkin represents for a moment...your inner space... do you have any sense of what is the one thing *in there* that is most bothersome to you?"

Rebecca looked down for a moment and then looked up and said, "It is my fight with my husband last night." Susan suggested to Rebecca that she might want to draw a square representing this fight on the napkin, adding, "Maybe check and see if there is something more... that is *there*?"

Rebecca was quiet for a moment and then said, "Yes, it is my unfinished project and my daughter's problems."

Again, she was invited to draw on the napkin. And again Susan suggested, "Maybe see if there is anything else...?" Rebecca looked down at the napkin and took a deep breath, "No, this is all... I feel relieved and lighter looking at this napkin by my side...I am hungry!"

We found that this short and active Clearing a Space really helps in shifting a person from a tight and stressful place to a more clear inner space. (This process can also be helpful with young children.)

CLEARING A SPACE WITHIN AN ELABORATED PROBLEM

Dan was anxious and upset about the project he was unable to complete. His co-worker Ron, knew Focusing and offered to help Dan sort out his problem.

Ron drew a big circle on a piece of paper and divided it into eight parts. He then made a Focusing suggestion to Dan, "Perhaps sit for a moment with the whole problem...and gently ask yourself... What...for me...is the one issue that is most problematic in this project? How many parts of this circle represent the issue?" Dan was surprised to discover that the fear of failure consumed four parts of the circle. Then, Ron suggested, "Now maybe ask yourself...what is the next most important issue that is there?"

Dan sat quietly looking at the four remaining segments and said, "Two parts of the circle represent my pride and my competition with my colleague about finishing first. The other two parts represent my anxiety over possibly not receiving the prize for the winning team." Dan experienced a shift and sat in the chair more relaxed and thoughtful. He experienced a Focusing-on-the-Go version of Clearing a Space with a difficult project.

SUMMARY

In this article we have presented a seventh movement, Action Step, and 'Focusing on the Go' — two innovations that represent the fruits of our past eight years of development and teaching the Focusing process in Israel. Our participants have been professionals and people from all walks of life, all of whom have been eager to increase their quality of daily living, especially under the political and security stressors of living in this country. These developments in Focusing join Gendlin's vision about spreading the language of Focusing as a language of the implicit in everyday life so that Focusing stands out as a new way of thinking and speaking.

Our participants report that they have experienced a new flow between their inner and outer realities. Not only they have experienced inner shifts within their Focusing process, but also were able to follow them with meaningful Action Step(s). One can think of a seventh movement: Action Step as igniting the car motor — on the inner journey — and then driving the car on the road. Thus, steps of Focusing and steps of outward action alternate and aid each other. In addition, ‘Focusing on the Go’ frees us to make beautiful mini trips in daily living on our longer life’s journey.

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TREASURE MAPS TO THE SOUL

Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell

Over the past fourteen years, we have been developing a body of practice and theory that we have been calling *Treasure Maps to the Soul*. During that time, the theory and practice supporting our work has become more refined and elaborated and, we feel, more effective. The primary areas of application are addiction, depression, severe self-criticism, unfulfilled desire ('obsession'), and in fact any area of life that the person experiences as persistently stuck and unchanging. We have developed our theory and concepts from the interaction between experiencing and conceptualizing. It would take more space than we have here to recount how those understandings were developed, but in the next section we give a brief summary of the origins and history of the work.

What we will be presenting in this article is a brief outline of the current state of our theoretical understanding and its applications. The companion article in this volume, p. 21 "Inner Relationship Focusing," will describe methodologies and give examples.

We are currently using the term Inner Relationship Focusing for the overall body of work. For now, *Treasure Maps to the Soul* remains the name of our 6-day workshop.

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

When the incident occurred that led to the work we are describing in this article, we had both been Focusing teachers for years. Ann had been developing applications for using Focusing with action blocks with some success. Barbara had experienced a life-changing Focusing session that had transformed her suicidal depression (which she wrote about in McGavin 1994). And both of us had been collaborating on developing Inner Relationship Focusing, which was changing our approach to inner criticism, among other things. Yet even after over thirty years of combined experience Focusing, we were each still struggling with difficult, stuck life issues that included action blocks, addiction to alcohol, addiction to eating for comfort, and obsessive longing.

On September 15, 1994, Ann realized that she was addicted to alcohol and had to stop drinking. As fate would have it, we were just about to co-lead a series of three workshops in the UK and Ireland. In the days leading up to the workshops, and in every free moment during them as well, we took every opportunity to do Focusing together and we started noticing certain things about our process.

It became clearer than ever that we couldn't simply do Focusing as we had learned it; i.e., Focusing with what we could already find in our bodies. We realized that, in the alcoholic drinking, Ann had been acting from a part of her that she could not feel, yet which was extremely powerful. We needed a way to make Focusing work more effectively with this complex kind of process if these problems were ever going to change — for us.

Ann's previous work with her writer's block was helpful in our understanding of the dynamics between conflicting parts and how relationship with such parts is crucial for their transformation.

Barbara's previous experiences of working with her inner critics were also very helpful here. She had already noticed how it was possible to turn towards aspects of one's self that can't be felt in the body, but that can be inferred to be present because of the effect that they are having. From the feeling of wanting to withdraw or feeling nauseous with shame or feeling worthless came the realization that there was something in her doing the shaming even when that could not be sensed directly. This inferred part could then be invited into awareness.

In those weeks of intensive Focusing, we were experiencing something remarkable: when we managed to do Focusing with those aspects of ourselves not in our awareness and yet generating 'unwanted' behavior, thoughts, or emotions, we got huge, life-changing shifts that were about much more than the problem area.

Not only was our capacity for acting freely in those previously impossibly difficult situations dramatically increased, so was our ability for interacting in the world in general. We felt like we were releasing whole areas of our selves. We found ourselves saying that the most difficult areas of life were "treasure maps to the soul."

Our workshop participants were so excited about the hints we dropped about our discoveries that we found ourselves sharing our thoughts and insights almost as soon as we were finding words for them. By the following year we had started offering six-day workshops called Treasure Maps to the Soul. From 1995 through the present day we have been offering these an average of three times a year, all over the world.

GENDLIN'S TERMS

In the development of this model, we have also been studying Gendlin's work intensively, especially *A Process Model* (1997), over the past several years, and our theoretical conceptualizations have been deeply influenced by his thinking. Many of the terms that we use come directly from this work. Here are some of our key definitions based on Gendlin's concepts from *A Process Model*:

- *A situation* is an interactional context which has an *implying* of its next steps.
- *Body* is much more than the physical material delimited by our skin. It is body as bodily felt, which includes the sense of here and now, there and then, and future. It is body as interaction with its environment. It is body as sensed from the inside.
- *Environment* is the interactional field of body and what the body lives in. It is more than what is immediately present and external to the physical body. It includes our symbolizations of situations that are not currently present.
- *Felt Sense*: "A felt sense is the wholistic, implicit, bodily sense of a complex situation" (Gendlin, 1996, p. 58).

- *Carrying forward* is a transforming of the interactional context (the situation) as a whole, bringing further new steps of living, and creating a new implying. The exact nature of that next step cannot be predetermined but ‘fulfills’ the situation’s implying. It changes it in a way which brings greater order and possibilities, interactional complexity, flexibility and creativity.
- *Implying* is experienced as implicit knowing of what will bring carrying forward of a situation.
 “What is implied is not some explicit structure (not even what usually happens and has many times carried forward) but something that will carry forward” (1997, p. 252).
- *Implicit*: What is consciously experienced but not yet symbolized, not yet explicitly formed. Not unconscious, also not ‘buried’, not already formed contents that we ‘discover’ or ‘uncover’.
- *Stoppage* occurs when the interactional possibilities in a situation become constrained. What is implied doesn’t occur, and therefore the implying of that situation remains unchanged. Much else occurs but none of that carries forward the situation as a whole. Discomfort is the bodily experience of stoppage. Unhappiness, frustration, anger, sadness... are the emotional experience of stoppage.
 “The organism stays in the field of the stoppage. It remains at the spot, and under the conditions, of the stoppage. It would have spent only a moment there, if the process had not stopped. Now new events might form with the environment, which could not have formed before the stoppage” (1997, p. 77).
- *Missing*: At a stoppage there is a missing. What is missing is what would carry forward the (organism, situation, body ...). What is missing is implied. From the felt-sense of what’s missing comes the knowing of what’s implied. What is implied is what ‘needs’ to happen. This is not a specific, single occurring. So it’s not that what was originally missing still needs to happen literally, but *whatever* brings carrying forward now is what ‘was’ missing. We experience this as wanting or longing.

SELF-IN-PRESENCE

In the remainder of this article, we will describe and discuss our own concepts as they have developed in our understanding of what enables *carrying forward* in people who are experiencing the results of a serious and long-term *stoppage*. The first and most important concept is *Self-in-Presence*.

Self is our capacity for interaction, our ability to meet (if not master) the challenges of the world. The state of our capacity for interaction is always in flux, determined by many factors. A person can experience Self as confident, clear, having a large perspective, flowing, empowered, peaceful, calm. In this case the capacity for interaction is (high, open, wide, unimpeded, free...). Or a person can experience Self as being on the verge of overwhelm or paralysis, at the mercy of others or of outer circumstances, small, vulnerable, fragile, wounded; the capacity for interaction is (low, constrained, narrow, limited...).

Presence is a state of being. It is the state that occurs when the capacity for interaction is unimpeded. When our Self is in a state of Presence, we are capable of acting with flow, sensing the whole situation (given the limits of what we can be aware of), connecting with here-and-now experience, and interacting freely with our environment. We call this *Self-in-Presence*.

Self-in-Presence is not an object within ourselves that we have to find. As we look out of our eyes, as we act in the world, embodied, calm, appropriately friendly, assertive, and curious, we could say we are Self-in-Presence. As we experience ourselves from the inside, as we sense the intricacy of our situations, as we create a safe inner environment for those aspects of our being that need rehabilitation, we could say we are Self-in-Presence.

CULTIVATING SELF-IN-PRESENCE:

Learning to actively cultivate Self-in-Presence is key for doing inner work with deeply stuck areas, and knowing how to facilitate others in cultivating Self-in-Presence is key for supporting and facilitating this process. Here are some of the ways in which we teach people to do this:

GROUNDING IN THE BODY HERE-AND-NOW:

- Noticing whatever feels open, alive, flowing, warm (...) in your body right now — even if that is only small or partial. Welcoming whatever feels alive and acknowledging whatever doesn't feel that way right now
- Being aware of the sensation of support under your body, sensing the quality of resting on the chair, feet on the floor, etc.
- Sensing your solid foundation, your base. Feeling the support of your hips, your pelvis and lower body
- Opening your eyes and looking at something

KEEPING COMPANY WITH:

- Using *Self-in-Presence* Language: “I’m sensing...” “I’m aware of...” “I’m noticing...”
- Disidentifying from Partial-Selves: Saying “something in me feels or is like...”
- Putting a gentle hand on the body location of a physical sensation or an emotional state

DRAWING ON MODELS AND METAPHORS OF SELF-IN-PRESENCE:

- Remembering being a Focusing Companion, caring friend or therapist and offering another person acceptance, openness, empathy without an agenda

- Sensing the qualities of a person you admire (your therapist, your Focusing partner, a fictional character, or spiritual being (Buddha, Kwan Yin, Jesus))
- Recalling a metaphor for Self-in-Presence such as a large bowl, a lap that many children can sit on
- Imagining a place of safety and beauty — sensing that in your body

SENSING DIRECTLY:

- Pausing and noticing how you are feeling. Directing attention to inner experiencing and holding it there. ‘Having’ that experience directly. Sensing for the whole thing as widely as possible.

Each of the ways of cultivating Self-in-Presence listed above can be translated into suggestions that a healing practitioner can give to their clients. For example:

- “You might take some time to feel your feet, your seat, the support of the chair beneath you.”
- “You’re sensing...” “You’re aware of...” “You’re noticing...”
- “Something in you feels or is like...”
- “Maybe you could put a gentle hand on the place in your body where you’re feeling that.”

These are elaborated further in Cornell (2005a).

PARTIAL-SELF PROCESS

Every chronically difficult life issue can be seen as a situation that has one implying with many competing attempts to find what will satisfy that implying and carry that situation forward. Each of these competing attempts fails to supply what is missing for carrying forward. Self-in-Presence is markedly absent.

During the course of our daily lives, as we encounter those situations that are perpetually stuck, we find ourselves attempting one solution after another. Each of these attempts is only partially successful at dealing with the logistical and experiential challenges of that situation, bringing limited feelings of relief at best. Some of these solutions are sufficiently successful at relieving distress and discomfort that they become habitual, repetitive sequences of emotion and behavior. None of them brings carrying forward of the whole situation.

Repetitive and habitual reaction sequences can become individually identifiable as they persist over time. Each has predictable emotional reactions, thought patterns, beliefs and behaviors. They often acquire labels, either self-given or from others: ‘my problem with anger,’ ‘your neediness,’ ‘borderline personality.’

We call these repetitive reaction sequences *Partial-Selves*. We call them *Partial* to denote their incomplete nature and acknowledge their functioning as if they are semi-autonomous or autonomous parts. The term *Selves* points to their positive living-forward qualities.

Any chronically blocked situation involves a complex, conflictual relationship between Partial-Selves. The person experiences identification (merging) and dissociation (exile) with Partial-Selves. This can be serial in nature, identifying with different Partial-Selves in turn — sometimes within a matter of seconds. Sometimes people become perpetually identified with one Partial-Self point of view, rejecting and attempting to control other Partial-Self processes when they become active (with varying degrees of success).

Partial-Selves are aspects of a situational process and form within the situation either here-and-now or as part of an internally formed symbolic sequence of there-and-then.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE IDENTIFIED WITH PARTIAL-SELVES

If we try to do Focusing and we are not Self-in-Presence, we don't get felt senses. Instead we get caught up in repetitive reaction states, including emotions, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors. Of course it is possible to do Focusing with these reaction states—but only if we can move into Self-in-Presence first. *When we are not Self-in-Presence, we are identified with a Partial Self.*

Partial-Selves arise at a stoppage. In Process Model terms, they are a *versioning* or *leafing*. They are attempts by the organism to live past the stoppage; i.e. carry forward. Gendlin says (1997, p. 236) that when the felt sense forms, the person is living past the stoppage. *But felt senses cannot form when the person is identified with a Partial Self.*

We can get a felt sense *of* a Partial Self, but only from Self-in-Presence. So recognizing Partial Selves and moving into Self-in-Presence is a pre-requisite to Focusing. It needs to happen *first*.

Partial Selves may then need a kind of reparative process, which includes giving them acknowledgement, respect, compassion, and a kind of deep listening for what they have been trying to contribute to the person. Although a Focusing guide or therapist can contribute to this reparative process, in essence it must be done by the person herself, as Self-in-Presence. Thus, the helping person's primary role is to facilitate and support the person to be Self-in-Presence.

Sometimes the reparative process with the Partial Selves can take months and years before getting a felt sense of the whole situation can happen, which is what really changes the stoppage. All of this is important and essential to the recovery process.

THREE KINDS OF PARTIAL-SELF

We have differentiated three distinct kinds of internal process that we call Controlling Partial-Selves, Defending Partial-Selves and Compromised Partial-Selves.

A *Controlling Partial-Self* is almost constantly anxious and tense. Anything could go wrong! It micro-manages everyone and everything. It creates visions of heaven and hell to lure or frighten the person into doing what it thinks is right. It is often hyper-aware of what others might think or say. It cajoles, manipulates, argues, rescues, reassures, criticizes, reasons, plans and generally tries to take control.

A *Defending Partial-Self* is highly reactive. It acts automatically, impulsively, compulsively, with little or no regard for the consequences of its behavior. A person who is in the grip of a Defending Partial-Self can feel as if they have been taken over by a compelling force that cannot be controlled.

A *Compromised Partial-Self* is often experienced as being wounded, in pain, small, helpless, grieving, enraged, believing that it is unable to be as it is without rejection or failure. A person who is merged with it may feel very young, easily hurt, fragile, worthless, useless, disgusting, contemptible, on the verge of falling apart and easily overwhelmed by emotions or memories. Often it is experienced as a wordless sense of distress, fear and/or physical discomfort.

Compromised Partial-Selves are desperately seeking the restoration of living forward. One of the most common ways this shows up is in actions driven by overwhelming longing for what was missing in the original situation.

Those familiar with the work of Richard Schwartz (1995) may recognize resonances with his three types of parts: manager, fire-fighter, and exile. However, the correspondence is not exact, and there are important differences, notably in our understanding of the importance of *agency*, and the process of exile. We also do not believe that parts are permanent. And finally, our process of working with Partial-Selves is different from the Internal Family Systems process.

We will now discuss these three kinds of Partial-Self in more detail.

CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELVES

People who are identified with a Controlling Partial-Self may feel critical of themselves and others, emotionally cold, logical, controlling, angry, revolted by their emotions, thoughts, or actions, guilty, inadequate or frustrated in their inability to control themselves or others.

A Controlling Partial-Self takes on the responsibilities of an adult, trying to make sense of the world, and find solutions and strategies to our problems. When we spend time with it, we often discover that it is actually more like a child that has needed to be old beyond its years. We may discover that it is exhausted from all of the years of trying to keep our lives on course.

It tries to control everything: the person's life, other people in the person's world, and the person's inner experience. From its point of view, it believes that if it isn't in control, everything is in danger of collapse.

Controlling Partial-Selves are hyper-alert to situations that they perceive as potentially dangerous. They fear situations that are unpredictable and can become overwhelmingly anxious about the future. They often feel that only if they know and understand everything they will be able to predict the future and so be able to control the future. They plan and scheme and strategize. They present a forceful (though not necessarily coherently logical) argument as to why their way is the right way.

They are the most logical of the three kinds of Partial-Selves. They can be highly analytical and very observant. They set boundaries and guard them. They are focused on defining right and wrong, deciding what reality is, judging good and bad. They evaluate constantly — behaviors, thoughts, emotions... and can be highly critical of self and others.

A Controlling Partial-Self can seem superficially reasonable, yet underneath, a quality of anxiety, tension, urgency and rigidity can be sensed. A Controlling Partial-Self can be fragile and subject to breakdown in situations that are beyond its resources and control. It can then become very critical and despairing.

The most important thing to know about Controlling Partial-Selves is that they are afraid. They are attempting to control the person's behavior, thoughts, and emotions because they are afraid — often deeply, deathly afraid. And any Partial-Self that is afraid needs compassion and company from Self-in-Presence in order that it can go through steps of life-forward change.

KNOWING A CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELF IS THERE

A Controlling Partial-Self can operate without the person being directly aware of it. Here are some of the signs that it is there:

- feeling ashamed, embarrassed, guilty
- hearing one's self say: "I'm so stupid!" "What is wrong with me?"
- labeling one's self: "I'm just lazy." "I'm pathetic."
- diagnosing one's self: "I'm trying too hard." "I'm not trying hard enough."
- coming up with quick solutions: "I just need to get up earlier." "If I just change this my life will be fine."
- experiencing friendly feedback as if it were criticism

Ought, should, must, never, always... those are words that Controlling Partial-Selves use.

Different people experience their Controlling Partial-Selves in different ways. Some people hear them. Some feel bad when they are around. Some see the dire consequences of "bad" actions or thoughts played out in their imagination.

CAPACITY FOR ACTION

A distinguishing feature of Controlling Partial-Selves is that they are not able to act directly in the world. To effect action, they have to persuade a Partial-Self capable of acting to do the action. This is why people often experience a Controlling Partial-Self as a voice in the head saying, “You should...” or “Why don’t you...?” The methods of persuasion include criticism (“You’re so lazy!”), threats (“If you don’t...!!”), blandishments (“It will be so good if you...”), bribes (“If you ... then you can ...”), and encouragements (“You deserve it!”).

Just as a Controlling Partial-Self is unable to act directly in the world, it is also unable to stop action being taken, except by exerting a constraining influence on a Partial-Self doing that action. One way that it does this is through the body: restricting breathing, constriction in the throat, headaches, stomachaches, distortion of sight, etc. It also generates catastrophic thoughts, threats of hellfire and damnation, and so on. It creates visions of the delights awaiting the person if only they try harder to limit behavior: for example, being able to fit in a size four dress, finding the perfect partner, achieving fame and fortune, and the like.

Rather than being always harsh, it can be subtle and manipulative; e.g. “Don’t you think you could try a little harder?” It offers quick solutions for problems: “If only you were more...” or “What you have to do is...” It can give the person direct orders: “Just get up and do it.” What this array of strategies has in common is that they are all efforts to exert influence on another Partial-Self because of a fundamental inability to act on its own.

BEING

Controlling Partial-Selves are also concerned with who we are as well as what we do. They have ideals about the kind of person that we should be and shame us for not living up to that ideal. They tell the person that they know what is wrong with them, and why they are in such a mess. They can be harsh and attacking: snide, sarcastic, sneering, righteous, impatient and, above all, belittling. They can undermine one’s very being: “You’ll never be good enough.” They can even sound helpful, making suggestions on how the person could improve: “Just think positively.” They make generalized judgments about who the person is: “You are a failure.”

DYNAMICS WITH OTHER PARTIAL-SELVES

Controlling Partial-Selves find the actions of a Defending Partial-Self worrisome or even frightening. They fear the loss of control that Defending Partial-Selves can bring. They may feel an overwhelming need to keep the pressure on Defending Partial-Selves to keep them on task (dieting and exercise are two common areas).

Controlling Partial-Selves also fear being overwhelmed by the emotions and memories of a Compromised Partial-Self. They are very frightened of the chaos that can occur

if a Compromised Partial-Self ‘escapes’ and takes over the Self position. They try to make sure that Compromised Partial-Selves don’t come into our awareness, working hard at keeping them in exile. It attacks them fiercely when they do escape from their bonds, showering disgust and revulsion down on them. It is extremely afraid of what might happen if they take over Self.

HOW A CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELF NEEDS TO BE TREATED BY SELF-IN-PRESENCE

Controlling Partial-Selves often want appreciation for the hard work that they have done over the years and are usually very open to communicating their concerns and hopes. They need to have their concerns acknowledged in a respectful manner (without getting caught up in whether they are right or wrong). By empathizing with the fear underneath their controlling, we can begin to help this Partial-Self to relax.

They are often open to new information and can respond well to being approached in a logical way. However, trying to negotiate or reason them out of their point of view is counterproductive. Connecting with what they are trying to help one be able to experience (what they are Wanting for the person) allows a reconnecting with the aspect of the implying that they ‘hold.’

A CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELF RETURNS TO SELF

When they feel confident that the person is Self-in-Presence, Controlling Partial-Selves transform. They no longer need to exert control over other Partial-Selves or other people. It is as if they melt away and all their abilities for planning, logical thinking, all their knowledge of the world, and abilities to hold a vision become incorporated into Self, available as needed in any situation.

DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES

The first important thing to know about a Defending Partial-Self is that it is trying to save the person’s life and maintain their integrity at the same time. The other thing that is essential to know about them is that *they can act*. They are not the only aspects of the person that are capable of action, but they are responsible for many of the actions that are taken in the face of unresolved, difficult life issues.

IDENTIFICATION WITH A DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELF

People who are identified with a Defending Partial-Self may feel overwhelmed, emotional, rebellious, ‘fake,’ adolescent, disconnected, depressed, embarrassed, ashamed, self-doubting, unable to do what they want to do, unable to stop doing what they don’t want to do, lethargic, resistant, compulsively people-pleasing, compulsively antagonistic, escapist, exhausted... the list goes on. They may also be highly competent, energetic, driven, always

on the go, always “Great!” One person may experience some or all of these states — and more — at different times.

KNOWING A DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELF IS THERE

Like a Controlling Partial-Self, a Defending Partial-Self can operate without the person being directly aware of it. Here are some of the signs that a Defending Partial-Self is present:

- When the person acts impulsively or compulsively
- When the person acts without previous thought or deliberation
- When the person feels taken over by emotions, overwhelmed, swept away
- When the person feels defensive, reactive, ashamed
- When the person feels depressed

Of the three kinds of Partial-Self, the Defending Partial-Self is usually the easiest to sense in the body initially and so is often the part that the person encounters first in a Focusing or therapy process. When the person is aware of emotions — anger, sadness, confusion, longing — these are likely to be the emotions of what we would term the Defending Partial-Self. Or the person may be aware of a generalized discomfort: something heavy pressing on the chest, an ache around the heart, a pain in the belly.

As the person gets to know it better, the Defending Partial-Self tends to be young, often adolescent, but usually not as young as the Compromised Partial-Selves.

THE JOB OF A DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELF

Defending Partial-Selves are caught in a paradoxical and impossible situation. Defending Partial-Selves have a number of purposes that they are simultaneously trying to fulfill. Some of these purposes are contradictory in nature.

- They are attempting to maintain both the safety and integrity of the Self.
- They need to contain and soothe the emotions and urges of a Compromised Partial-Self.
- They may also be contending with anxious Controlling Partial-Selves that are either vying for dominance or attacking them (or both).
- They may be dealing with other Defending Partial-Selves that believe that they have a better solution to the presenting problem and who are also attempting to take over.
- And last, but not least, they have a double-barreled burden: they need to resolve, (heal, carry forward...) the initial situation (which is often no longer in awareness) *and* they also need to solve the problems that have arisen from the failure of the initial situation to carry forward.

Needless to say, this is impossible for any Partial-Self to do successfully.

HOW THEY OPERATE

A Defending Partial-Self reacts powerfully and automatically whenever it feels that the Self is being threatened. From its point of view, the Compromised Partial-Self it is defending is Self, and it is triggered into action when that Partial-Self becomes active. The Defending Partial-Self has become the next step of the situational sequence.

When it is trying to prevent the feelings of pain of a Compromised Partial-Self from entering and overwhelming awareness, a Defending Partial-Self responds so quickly that the person doesn't even know that they have become identified with it until after it has acted. The call to action, when one is aware of it at all, can feel like an overwhelming, compelling urge. We call this "hijack."

There are four basic strategies that a Defending Partial-Self uses: being 'good,' being bad,' running away, and collapsing.

BEING 'GOOD'

The human need to affiliate is natural and cooperation is a valuable human capacity. However, when a person's need for affiliation is linked to the constraint of vital interactional possibilities, the result is an activity called 'people-pleasing.'

Someone may believe that s/he needs to work extra hard, be extra successful, or strive for perfection in order to be accepted, to be 'good enough.' Someone may become obsessively goal-oriented in order to gain success at work or in school, attain bodily perfection, or have fame and fortune. When a person is identified with a Defending Partial-Self that holds these beliefs, the person does whatever it takes to achieve the stated goals.

These two styles of being 'good,' compulsively pleasing others and ruthlessly pursuing goals of hard work and achievement, are often socially approved, especially for women in the first instance and men in the second.

BEING 'BAD'

When the human need to maintain autonomy and integrity feels more important than being accepted, and there is constraint on the full life-forward energy, the result is fighting, rebelling, being 'bad.' When a person feels that s/he can never succeed at being accepted or included, that person may choose being 'bad.' When a person feels that s/he cannot respect or trust those in positions of authority, that person may choose being 'bad.'

A Partial-Self that is fighting says things like "I'm not stupid!" or "I don't care! I'm doing it anyway, and hang the consequences." This kind of part will react against anything it feels is constricting or phony or meaningless or arbitrary. Many of us identify with our rebelling Partial-Selves. Being merged with a rebelling part generally feels a lot better than

being merged with any of the other types of Defending Partial-Selves. There's usually a lot of energy available when we are merged with a rebel. A rebel often has a stubborn teenager quality or righteous freedom fighter quality about it. In action blocks, the part that doesn't do the action is often a rebel. In addictions, the part that does the behavior is often a rebel. In depression, the part that refuses to be cheered up is often a rebel. In the case of unfulfilled desire, the part that clings to the desire is often a rebel. There is a lot of counterculture support for this kind of behavior — from James Dean to gangsta rap.

RUNNING AWAY:

A Defending Partial-Self that is running away handles discomfort and distress by withdrawing. It often creates feeling blank, confused, numb, forgetting, going to sleep. Anything to “get me out of here — right now!” Often it uses addictive substances and behaviors to withdraw our awareness from our immediate experiencing.

COLLAPSING:

The fourth response is the response of last resort — collapsing. A person is merged with a Collapsing Defending Partial-Self when s/he feels overwhelmed and defeated, unable to act or think. One feels embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty. One may also feel bad, depressed, despondent, self-doubting, hopeless, pathetic, useless, weak, and so on. A Collapsing Defending Partial-Self agrees with a Controlling Partial-Self, saying, “You're right, I am that bad, and I feel so bad about it.” It feels like the truth. There is a lot of social rejection for collapsing which, needless to say, increases one's sense of collapse.

HOW DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES INTERACT WITH OTHER PARTIAL-SELVES

Defending Partial-Selves occupy a position between Controlling Partial-Selves and Compromised Partial-Selves. This is a complex position. On the one hand they are reacting to the attempts at control from Controlling Partial-Selves and on the other, they are dealing with the emotions and actions of Compromised Partial-Selves. Their own emotions, their fears and desires, somehow need to be dealt with, as well.

DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES AND CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELVES

Defending Partial-Selves may view Controlling Partial-Selves as the enemy. In that case their responses are likely to be fight ('bad') or flight ('running away').

Conversely, when they don't know what to do, they may look to Controlling Partial-Selves to guide them. Some Controlling Partial-Selves can feel like adults to Defending Partial-Selves, and they will cooperate willingly. Coalitions are formed between Controlling Partial-Selves and Defending Partial-Selves when they share an ideal of how to be and then work together to make it happen. They agree on the problem and the solution.

The more capable a coalition between a Controlling Partial-Self and a Defending Partial-Self is at keeping us functioning successfully, the more we tend to become identified with it. But there is always an edge of anxiety and urgency to such collaborations, even at their most highly functioning.

Nothing that a Defending Partial-Self does is ever enough to completely allay the fears of a Controlling Partial-Self. A Defending Partial-Self may find itself moving from being 'good' to 'rebellious' in the blink of an eye. Or it may run away from or collapse under demands that it finds are too much.

DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES AND COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES

Defending Partial-Selves react powerfully and automatically whenever they feel that Self is being threatened. From its point of view, the Compromised Partial-Self which it is protecting is Self and its job is to take care of it.

When it is trying to prevent the feelings of pain of a Compromised Partial-Self from overwhelming awareness, a Defending Partial-Self responds so quickly that the person doesn't even know that they have been 'hijacked' until after it has happened. The call to action, when one is aware of it, feels like an overwhelming, compelling urge.

A Defending Partial-Self learns many ways to soothe/numb/contain/distract a distressed Compromised Partial-Self. Here are some of the most extreme examples:

- Addiction — drug, alcohol, sex, computer games, exercise, shopping, work...
- Compulsive behavior — shoplifting, shopping, self-harming, eating (overeating, anorexic eating, bulimic eating), stalking...
- Acting irresponsibly — for example not paying bills on time or driving recklessly
- Persistent procrastination
- Having affairs
- Violent behavior
- Lying and bargaining
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Suicidal thoughts/attempts

Sometimes Defending Partial-Selves and Compromised Partial-Selves band together and cause complete havoc in a person's life. There is often a rebellious, stubborn, angry quality to their actions (even if the action is staying in bed with the covers over one's head). When a person is taken over by them, it may feel as if one is out of control, crazy, manic, not thinking clearly.

A person taken over by a Defending Partial-Self can act with impulsive disregard for their own well-being and the safety of others. They often abuse alcohol, drugs, people, food, money, their bodies, etc. A good example of what can happen when this kind of coalition gets the upper hand was portrayed by the main character in “All That Jazz” who, even when he had been diagnosed with a severe heart condition, threw parties, drank champagne and did drugs in his hospital room. In the story, the character dies.

HOW DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES BREAK DOWN

The coalition between ‘good’ Defending Partial-Selves and Controlling Partial-Selves is very prone to breakdown. Although this can be quite a stable and productive relationship lasting for several years, it can become quite unbalanced when stressed: the hard working employee who becomes a ‘workaholic,’ the person who exercises regularly who becomes addicted to exercise, the good student who becomes obsessed about his/her grades and always has to achieve top marks. ‘Good’ Defending Partial-Selves may become exhausted by the unrelenting efforts that they have made to satisfy the requirements of the Controlling Partial-Self that they are linked to. As the need for authenticity and autonomy starts to gain the ascendancy, a ‘bad’ or a ‘running away’ Defending Partial-Self may take over the Self position: the ‘good’ student starts staying up all night drinking, having unprotected sex, and doing drugs; the ‘hard worker’ can’t stop playing computer games; the person who has achieved their target weight now finds that their eating is out of control.

‘Bad’ and ‘running away’ Defending Partial-Selves may collapse under the criticism of a Controlling Partial-Self that tells them how bad or weak or lazy they are.

And Defending Partial-Selves that are in collapse already are vulnerable to attack from Controlling Partial-Selves that criticize them, telling them that they are lazy, pathetic, good-for-nothing, exacerbating their state of collapse and potentially pushing them over the edge into suicidal depression.

HOW A CONTROLLING PARTIAL-SELF NEEDS TO BE TREATED BY SELF-IN-PRESENCE

Defending Partial-Selves need greater sensitivity to the quality of the relationship than Controlling Partial-Selves need. They usually are particularly sensitive about how respectfully they are being treated and can either become reactive and angry or withdraw altogether if criticized or pushed (even obliquely). They also appreciate having their concerns (apprehensions, fears, worries, terrors...) and hopes (longings, dreams, desires...) for the person empathically acknowledged.

A DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELF RETURNS TO SELF

When they feel confident that they are accompanied by a person who is Self-in-Presence, Defending Partial-Selves transform. They no longer need to react to other Partial-Selves, other people, or situations. When they become released from their role as defender,

their energy, competence, integrity, and capacity for action become incorporated into Self, available as needed in any situation.

COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES

Before a stoppage there is free interaction. Then we encounter a situation that does not carry forward. What occurs not only doesn't bring carrying forward of the implying, it further blocks it, making its carrying forward even less possible. Our efforts fail.

There is an immediate bodily response to this stoppage: discomfort, emotional distress or even physical pain. Body sensations and emotions that we are unable to fully experience at the time — too intense, too frightening, too difficult to stay with — become stopped process. The implying of the situation that would have changed remains the same — frozen in time. How this lives in our bodies, our beings, our psyches is like a wound that never really heals.

The Treasure Maps term for this type of process is Compromised Partial-Self.

IDENTIFICATION WITH A COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELF

A person who is identified with a Compromised Self may feel longing and dread, love and hate. They may experience being pierced to the heart, or as if their life blood has drained away, or lost and wandering far from home. They may feel 'skinless,' 'boneless,' nauseated, terrified, violated, utterly isolated. They may feel as fragile as an egg, as young as a newborn, defenseless, open, helpless, hopeless, powerless. Their stomach may churn, their heart ache, tears may be right under the surface or running down their cheeks. They may burn with anger. They may be cold with rage. They may feel raw, their emotions ruling them and their actions.

KNOWING A COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELF IS THERE

Here are some signs that a person is identified with a Compromised Partial-Self:

- The person bursts into tears for "no reason"
- The person feels that they are not worthy to be alive
- The person feels about two inches tall and wishes that the ground would open up and swallow them
- The person lashes out in anger at the smallest things
- The person feels that everybody is out to get them
- The person feels overwhelmed and vulnerable

A person who is identified with a Compromised Partial-Self will probably already be feeling something in their body. Often what they may be aware of are emotions: shame, longing, despair... Or they may be aware of something that feels painful or something that

they can find no words for. As the person gets to know it better, the Compromised Partial-Self tends to be very young, often pre-verbal.

During a Focusing and/or therapy process, a person may become aware of monsters, pits, stones, things hiding in caves, behind doors, or under blankets. All of these may be how a Compromised Partial-Self may appear when it first comes into awareness. It may seem to be an inanimate object or something that seems ugly, disgusting, or frightening. This is how it appears from the point of view of another part that is frightened of it (often a Controlling Partial-Self).

THE JOB OF A COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELF

When a Compromised Partial-Self forms, there are at least two situations that need to be solved:

- the release of what has been compromised (to live authentically, to be oneself, to interact freely...)
- and the carrying forward of the situation-as-a-whole.

The inner pressure exerted by these unresolved situations is enormous. A significant part of a person's energy may be bound up in attempting to find carrying forward for situations that are no longer in their awareness.

Compromised Partial-Selves are always seeking the resumption of living forward by attempting to find what was (is) missing (or a substitute for it) in the situation. This drive is so strong that it is common for a Compromised Self to leak into people's emotions, thoughts and actions. Its attempts to find carrying forward will now motivate actions in situations only tangentially similar to the original situation. Nothing that is found will heal this rift, this block, or fill in this "missing." And that adds another layer of pain upon the first, the second, the third...

In this overwhelming longing, in the wishes and in the actions driven from obsessive fantasies, lies the compass that points the way back to what has been left behind and forward to where we belong. The Job of a Compromised Partial-Self is to be the compass.

HOW COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES OPERATE

When a person is merged with a vulnerable Compromised Partial-Self, that person will do almost anything for the possibility of healing this wounded 'missing,' including seeking out and staying in relationships and situations that are destructive from the perspective of other Partial-Selves and from Self-in-Presence. Even if the person is 'successful' in the present situation, receiving what was initially missing, the nagging feelings of failure or lack will very often persist.

Some people live very close to this state a lot, if not most, of the time. Some therapies encourage becoming identified with this emotional state — feeling it more intensely and

expressing it directly. Falling into this state can be retraumatizing, and we don't recommend it. Alternatively, being with a Compromised Partial-Self from Self-in-Presence can bring healing.

HOW COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES INTERACT WITH OTHER PARTIAL-SELVES

COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES AND CONTROLLING PARTIAL SELVES

From the point of view of a Compromised Partial-Self, Controlling Partial-Selves are God, Mother, Father, the Devil, the Enemy, the Savior... They experience Controlling Partial-Selves as punishing, evaluating, pushing, belittling, undermining, conditionally caring, encouraging.

- They often try to hide from them.
- They may collapse under the caustic criticism from Controlling Partial-Selves.
- They may feel frozen in place by them, unable to think, feel, move.

COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELVES AND DEFENDING PARTIAL-SELVES

From the point of view of a Compromised Partial-Self, Defending Partial-Selves are brother, sister, rescuer, friend, protector, cohort, playmate. However, Defending Partial-Selves can also turn on a Compromised Partial-Self if it becomes overwhelmed by the distressed feelings of the Compromised Partial-Self, like an older sibling tired of taking care of a younger child.

HOW A COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELF NEEDS TO BE TREATED BY SELF-IN-PRESENCE

Compromised Partial-Selves are the most sensitive about how they are approached and related to. Often Compromised Partial-Selves have been exiled. The process of exiling is a process of identification with something in the person that rejects, despises and fears the part being exiled. Of the three kinds of Partial-Self, a Compromised Partial-Self is often the most shy. It often has little or no trust that it will be welcomed and may need time to feel confident that you are Self-in-Presence and can keep it company with gentle compassion and patience.

Compromised Partial-Selves can very easily feel unsafe and vanish from conscious awareness. They may need long periods of Self-in-Presence just quietly keeping company with them, empathizing with their feelings, directly sensing how they feel in the body, and noticing the symbols that arise that match what they are like. Any suggestion of either criticism or pushing them to be different from how they are will result in them staying the same or vanishing from awareness. Continuously sensing for how fully one is in a state of

Self-in-Presence is highly facilitative for creating the kind of safe environment in which an Compromised Partial-Self can transform.

A COMPROMISED PARTIAL-SELF RETURNS TO SELF

When one is able to keep this kind of Partial-Self company, it almost always feel like getting close to the core of what “this whole thing” is really about. A strong Self-in-Presence is needed in order that a Compromised Partial-Self can recommence and complete its interrupted sequence without being taken over by it. This may include the expression of emotion or the recognition and acknowledgement of beliefs that have arisen.

Of course, sensing and symbolizing the situation as a whole, now that this Partial-Self has emerged into awareness is also an essential aspect of the healing process.

There is a strange and extraordinary paradox that we have noticed time and time again. When one is able to be with and to sense directly the aspect of Self that we call ‘Compromised’ — that in us which has looked, sounded, and felt so dreadfully wounded — *it is fine*. From its own point of view, it is truly all right. Sometimes much more than that — wonderful. Such transformations have to be felt to be believed, but this is something that we have both experienced several times. There is always a kind of astonishment when it occurs, and we have increasing confidence that this is not only possible, but can almost be expected.

‘THE POWERS’

We have differentiated four processes that address the difficulties experienced in attempting to Focus with these issues. All four of them are helpful in strengthening Self-in-Presence and felt-sensing (Focusing). For ease of reference we have called them ‘The Powers.’

The Power of Self-in-Presence concentrates on strengthening one’s identification with what is able to interact freely, turn towards one’s inner experiencing and hold it in awareness. It enables disidentification from Partial-Selves and a rehabilitative relationship to form with them.

The Power of And enables people to have more than one Partial-Self in awareness without becoming identified with any of them. It also allows the possibility of sensing multiple aspects of a situation simultaneously. This can assist greatly in the forming of a felt-sense (direct referent) of the whole of a situation.

The Power of Not-Wanting and Wanting provides a protocol that assists in sensing for the implying that a Partial-Self has been striving to realize. It also provides the depth of compassionate attention that was longed for and not available at the time of the initial stoppage, and thus the Focuser themselves is able to provide the manner of relating that was missing at the time. This also contributes to the strengthening of Self-in-Presence.

The Power of Holding it All supports sensing the situation and all Partial-Selves (already known or not yet known) simultaneously from Self-in-Presence. This facilitates the forming of a felt sense (direct referent), symbolizing and resonating (Focusing).

CONCLUSION

We have discussed a few of the key concepts of the body of work called Treasure Maps to the Soul, or Inner Relationship Focusing. We have not had the space to include much more that is part of the work, including examples, applications to specific problem areas, and further discussion of the processes of merging and exile. Those can be found in a few other places: notably McGavin and Cornell (2002) and Cornell (2005b).

See also “Inner Relationship Focusing” in this volume (p. 21).

We are grateful to Gene Gendlin for two levels of resource: for his powerful concepts about human process and change, and for his support and encouragement for theory creation. It is a fundamental part of his theory that theory-building does not end with him. Our heartfelt appreciation and thanks.

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PART 2
PHILOSOPHY



THE FELT SENSE OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

Herbert W. Schroeder

INTRODUCTION

I am an environmental psychologist working in a research unit of the United States Forest Service. The researchers in our office are all social scientists who study how people interact with natural environments. Our goal is to provide information and tools to support natural resource managers and policymakers in planning, designing, and managing environments with people in mind.

As an environmental psychologist, my research has looked in various ways at how people perceive, experience, and value natural environments. When I began my career, I mainly used quantitative methods to measure people's preferences for environments and to model how objective features of environments, like the numbers and sizes of trees of different species, influence preferences. This was often a useful approach, but after a while I began to feel as if this analytical approach was leaving out something important. I knew both from my own experience and from accounts by other people that there are deeper emotional and intuitive responses to natural environments that go far beyond simple preference. At that time, there was a growing recognition in the forest management and research community that this kind of experience matters to many people and needs to be recognized in the environmental decision-making process. I became interested in understanding the deeper, hard-to-define experiences and values that people find in nature, which go by names like "spiritual values" and "sense of place". In doing this, I began to shift from using quantitative, statistical methods to a more qualitative approach in doing my research.

It was around this time that I was in a book store and came across a copy of Gene Gendlin's book, *Focusing* (1981). I was immediately attracted to it and began to use Focusing as a way of working with issues in my personal life. Several years later, I began to realize that Gendlin's ideas and methods were also very relevant to my research on environmental psychology.

FOCUSING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF NATURE

One of my colleagues, Charles Lewis, was a horticulturist at the Morton Arboretum near our office in the Chicago area. He was conducting sessions with art students to help them become more aware of how they experienced the landscapes they were painting at the Arboretum. His procedure was based on a discovery that he made by observing his own experience of the environment. He found that when he paid careful attention to how he felt in the center of his body as he walked through the Arboretum, he could discern a subtle, visceral change as he moved from one place to another. He could actually feel the difference in the landscape, in the form of what he called an "inner tug". By teaching the art students to

tune into their bodies' subtle, physical responses to the environment, they became better able to select the settings they wanted to paint, and their paintings reflected a deeper appreciation for the setting (Lewis, 1996).

It occurred to me that Charles (who had never heard of Gene Gendlin or Focusing) had independently discovered an environmental version of a *felt sense*. By paying attention to the felt sense of the environment and noticing how the felt sense changed as they moved between environments, Charles and the art students were able to gain insight into their preferences for different kinds of landscapes. You can try this for yourself. Notice if you can feel a difference in the center of your body when, for example, you move from being in a room indoors to being outside under the sky, or when you walk from a dense thicket of trees into a wide open meadow. You may be able to discern a visceral shift just by gazing at photographs of different kinds of landscapes, or even by vividly imagining yourself being in different environments that you have experienced in the past.

Intrigued by Charles' discovery, I decided to try an experiment of my own. On a visit to the Morton Arboretum one spring day, I tried using Gendlin's six Focusing steps with my felt sense of the environment as I walked through various outdoor natural settings. As I reported in an early issue of *The Folio* (Schroeder, 1990), focusing on the felt sense of the Arboretum environment led me to a clearer awareness of how and why natural environments have value for me. Starting from a feeling of fascination with a particular environmental feature (a chorus of frogs), I was led to a sense of rightness — a feeling that “this is where I belong”. This developed into an experience of relief and profound serenity. In the absence of stress and pressure, I had an inward, bodily sense of myself expanding out into space, as though the boundary separating myself from my environment had become relaxed and permeable. After this initial experience with Focusing in nature, I continued to explore the felt senses of places where I enjoy hiking and spending time outdoors. I discovered that the combination of serenity with an inward sense of expansion (which I call *inwardly opening-out* or *i.o.o.*) is a characteristic feature of my experience of natural environments.

Rather than explicitly using the 6 steps from Gendlin's Focusing book, as I did the first time at the Morton Arboretum, I have developed a more free-form approach to focusing on the felt sense of environments. When I am in a natural environment, I pay attention to what I am feeling inside and how that is affected by my surroundings. I almost always notice a definite change in my feelings after I have spent a little while in a natural place. I try to observe what is happening inside me and then sense what it is about the environment and situation that is bringing forth such a change. I sometimes then have openings of insight into how and why a natural environment enables this change to occur. I find words or phrases that express these insights and check them against the felt sense to see if there is a resonance or response that confirms the rightness of that way of expressing the insight. Sometimes this develops into a kind of mini-theory that both explains and carries forward my sense of nature and how I respond inwardly to natural surroundings. The experience often seems to unfold through a series of steps or insights, which I try to remember so that I can write them down later. Sometimes I carry a notebook or a tape recorder with me so that I can keep a record of the experience as it is occurring. This process often leads to a heightened sense of delight, gratitude, and appreciation for the natural environment.

A TAE THEORY OF RELATING TO NATURE

By means of this process, I have been able to explore and unfold some of the ‘edges’ in my experience of nature and to begin understanding why experiences like serenity and *i.o.o.* occur more often for me in natural settings than in built or urban environments. Here, briefly, are three examples of insights that have emerged from focusing on my felt sense of serenity and *i.o.o.* in natural places:

- *This is where I belong.* In natural places I have a feeling of rightness, of fitting in perfectly, of there being no conflict, tension, or pressure at the interface between me and my surroundings. There is no need for defensiveness, no need to push away or separate myself from what is around me. There is a sense of continuity and compatibility between me and the environment that invites me to let go and relax into my experience of nature.
- *Nothing needs to be done.* The environment is self-sufficient. It does not need me to do anything for it and does not demand any particular action or response on my part. The living things around me form a system that functions on its own, without me having to manage or maintain it. I can be at rest, because the environment is able to take care of itself.
- *Nature as an egoless other.* The natural things around me have no egos, no sense of themselves as socially defined selves. Therefore, they do not engage the part of my mind that is concerned with social norms, expectations, goals, and projects. In the midst of egoless nature, I am able to rest from the ongoing effort and tension of being an ego among other egos in the human, social world.

These insights all seem to have something in common. They are like variations on a theme. That is, they all seem to stem from an underlying, implicit sense of how the experience of serenity and *i.o.o.* arises in response to a natural environment. Several years ago I attended the Focusing Institute’s Thinking at the Edge workshop and began to formulate a theory for this underlying theme.

Thinking at the Edge (TAE) is an experiential practice for constructing theories that speak from a person’s implicit, felt sense of an area of interest (Hendricks, 2004). My TAE theory began with the paradoxical notion that human beings are at the same time both part of nature and separate from nature. In Western culture, nature has often been regarded as a realm existing apart from human beings — an original, pristine paradise in which human beings are intruders and despoilers. In recent years, however, postmodern scholars have ‘deconstructed’ this concept of nature, claiming that the distinction between natural and artificial environments is socially constructed and therefore has no objective basis. From this viewpoint, human cultures and natural systems are not separate domains. Human activity and human-influenced environments are as much a part of nature as the caribou’s migration and the beavers’ building of dams. On the one hand, I can see that there is some validity in this argument. On the other hand, I feel uneasy about attempts to abolish the human-nature distinction from our thinking about the environment. While intellectually I agree that humans and their works are in some sense part of nature, I also know from my own

experience that there is a profound shift in how I feel when I am in a natural setting. I sense that something important is lost by denying that there is any difference between natural and human-influenced environments.

In my TAE theory, I try to find a way to say how we humans are a part of nature while, at the same time, we make ourselves separate from nature. The key terms in the theory are *intrinsic process*, *imposed patterns*, and (felt) *space*. By intrinsic process I mean things moving and carrying forward in their own way. We humans have (or are) intrinsic process, like all other living beings, and in that sense we are part of nature. But we also separate ourselves from nature by imposing human patterns on the intrinsic process in our environment and in ourselves. Imposed patterns constrain the ways in which intrinsic process can move. The way in which intrinsic process moves within me registers in my awareness as a felt sense of space. When my intrinsic process is able to move freely, I experience a sense of space that is open and expansive. When my intrinsic process is constrained, my felt sense of space registers as constricted and confined.

I make a basic distinction between *doing* and *being* as ways of relating to the environment. Doing is the imposing of patterns. In doing, I am trying to shape or mold the environment according to a pattern that does not arise from the intrinsic process of the environment itself. Imposing patterns on intrinsic process requires work. It takes mental and physical effort to override the intrinsic process of the environment and to maintain the human patterns that we impose upon it. In *being*, I simply experience the environment as it is, without trying to impose my patterns on it. When my way of relating to the environment shifts from doing to being, I experience relaxation and serenity because I need not maintain the effort of shaping or molding the environment to my patterns. The intrinsic process of the environment carries forward on its own, without any effort on my part.

We impose human patterns not only on the environment, but also on the intrinsic process within ourselves. We constantly impose patterns on ourselves and on other people, based on our conceptual systems, interpersonal expectations, social norms, and personal goals and projects. Discursive thinking plays a key role in creating and maintaining these human patterns in our own minds and in our interactions with other people. As a social being, my intrinsic process is continually constrained by patterns imposed by other people and by my own discursive thinking. When I am interacting with other people or perceiving human-made patterns in the environment, discursiveness and socially imposed patterns are reinforced. But in a natural environment this discursiveness and social patterning are absent. Non-discursive nature does not evoke or reinforce the discursive, ‘doing’ side of my mind. Thus, a natural environment facilitates the shift from doing into being. My intrinsic process is released from the constraints of social patterns, and my mind can take a rest from the effort of imposing patterns on myself and others.

My inward, intrinsic process *resonates* with the environment in an intricate way. By this I mean that the environment plays a vital role in determining how my inward process can carry forward while, at the same time, my intrinsic process implies the kind of environment that it needs in order to carry forward freely. When I am in an environment that enables my intrinsic process to carry forward in its own way, there is no sense of conflict or incompatibility between me and the environment. Such an environment enables my intrinsic

process to move in ways consistent with its own intrinsic tendencies; hence I feel a sense of fitting in perfectly and being in the place where I belong. For me, this experience of fitting in occurs most often in natural environments, where the intrinsic process of the environment is not obscured or molded by imposed human patterns. The absence of humanly imposed patterns in a natural environment allows the intrinsic process in me to resonate with the intrinsic process of the environment. This registers in my awareness as a sense of opening and expanding — taking me out of my socially-constructed self, out of the human world, and into a wider, more expansive felt space. This is the experience of inwardly-opening-out that I described earlier.

When human patterns are imposed on a natural environment, they alter or obscure the intrinsic process of the environment to a greater or lesser degree. My inward intrinsic process is then no longer able to resonate with the intrinsic process of the environment but, instead, becomes engaged with the human patterns that obscure that process. This engagement with humanly imposed patterns constrains my inward process from being able to carry forward freely. As a result, I experience a sense of constriction in my felt sense of space.

This is not to say that we humans should never impose our patterns on natural environments. Obviously, there is often great value in imposing our patterns on nature. After all, pattern-imposing (doing) is an essential aspect of the human creative process. In distinguishing between doing and being, I do not intend to imply that one of these modes of relating is inherently better than the other.

If we are not too heavy-handed, then the intrinsic process of nature may still show through in an environment where human patterns are imposed to some degree. For example, a garden is a place where human patterns have been imposed and yet the intrinsic process of nature is still visible through and within those patterns. But when we impose our human patterns on an environment to such an extent that the intrinsic process of nature is completely obscured (for example, a totally enclosed, artificial environment), then all that remains for us to relate to in that environment is our own patterns. We then inhabit a self-contained sphere, consisting only of the products of human thought and action. Our relating to the environment becomes a closed loop, in which we can only engage with patterns that we ourselves have created. Our awareness has no opportunity to open out into a larger, non-human world. This, in terms of my TAE theory, is how we separate ourselves from nature.

EXPERIENTIAL THEORIES

I see some points of contact or similarity between my TAE theory and conventional scientific accounts of the human-nature relationship in my professional field. For example, one well-known theory says that natural environments foster mental restoration because they allow people to recover from directed attention fatigue (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). According to this theory, directed attention is the mental faculty that enables us to screen out distractions and focus our attention on the task at hand. When this faculty becomes fatigued through overuse, we experience various kinds of mental and behavioral dysfunction. The Kaplans' theory says that natural features of environments are inherently fascinating, so our attention is drawn to them involuntarily without any effort on our part. This allows the

faculty of directed attention to rest and be restored when we are in a natural setting. In terms of my TAE theory, I would say that directed attention is characteristic of the effortful doing mode of relating to the environment. Fascination and involuntary attention, on the other hand, seem to involve the being mode of resonating with the intrinsic process of nature. Crossing my theory with that of the Kaplans might open up new avenues for developing each of these theories in light of the other.

One important way in which my theory differs from that of the Kaplans (and from most other scientific theories in my field) is that it was derived by sensing into my own personal experience of the subject matter, instead of by collecting data about other people and things. In other words, my theory is an instance of first-person science (Gendlin and Johnson, 2004). Another important difference is that the terms in my theory make direct reference to aspects of my own experience. That is, my theory is not only derived from my own experience; it is also about my own experience. I call theories with this characteristic *experiential theories*.

Not all TAE theories are experiential theories in this sense, but TAE appears to be an especially effective method for developing experiential theories. At a recent conference of recreation researchers, I presented a paper advocating the use of first-person science and experiential theories in recreation research (Schroeder, 2007, 2008a). In this presentation I gave an example of an experiential theory of what it means to be on vacation, which draws on some of the same themes as my TAE theory of relating to nature (for example space, freedom, and imposed forms).

The terms in an experiential theory stand in a direct and ongoing relationship with the first-person experience that the theory is about. Such a theory not only describes the researcher's experience; it also changes the experience in a particular way. The way in which the theory evokes, resonates with, and carries forward the researcher's experience is an important indicator of the validity of the theory. Thus, an experiential theory can never be separated from the experience that it is about. If the terms of the theory do lose their interactive contact with the actual experience, then the theory is no longer an experiential theory.

I do not advocate completely replacing conventional scientific theories and methods with first-person science. I do, however, think that experiential theories could be a useful addition to research on topics like recreation and environmental perception, where the subject matter has obvious experiential aspects.

THE CONCEPT OF VALUE

My experience with Gendlin's experiential practices and my reading of *A Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997) have led me to rethink one of the basic concepts in my field from a first-person perspective. The concept of *value* is both one of the most important and one of the most confusing concepts in the domain of natural resource management. Different disciplines define and use the word "value" in different ways in theory and practice. Two of the most common ways of defining value are known as *held value* and *assigned value* (Brown, 1984). Held value is defined as an enduring conception of what is good or preferable, while

assigned value is defined as the expressed worth (in words or behavior) of one thing relative to another. For example, the belief that one should protect and preserve natural environments is a held value, while the price that one is willing to pay to visit a National Park is an assigned value.

Scientists in the field of natural resources often assume that held values are the basis for assigned values. In other words, these scientists believe that behavioral choices and preferences are determined by concepts of what is good, right, or desirable. I see two troublesome implications in this way of looking at value. First, by assuming that values originate in conceptual thought, this view downplays the importance of feeling in human preference and choice. Research focuses on how people's cognitive beliefs about what is good or bad influence their behavior and choices. Feeling is seen as merely a side-effect of conceptual thought, hence feeling is often ignored in research, theory, and practice relating to natural resource values. Second, this view implies that only human beings can have values, because only humans are capable of conceptual thought. If concepts about what is good or bad are the basis of value, then the behavior of non-human species who do not think conceptually can only be seen as mechanistic and purposeless, rather than as directed by values. This way of understanding value reinforces the belief that humans are fundamentally different from and superior to all other living things, which in turn has implications for environmental ethics and the treatment of non-human species.

Drawing on Gendlin's (1997) *Process Model*, I have developed a different way of understanding value. From my own experience of Focusing in natural places, I know that the value of an environment involves not only concepts of what is good or desirable (held values) and verbal or behavioral expressions of worth (assigned values), but also an immediate *feeling* of the importance of the environment. Therefore, I have added a third definition to the two existing definitions of held value and assigned value. I define *felt value* as the immediate, felt sense of worth or importance that something has for someone (Schroeder, 2004, 2008b). Felt value is the implicit side of held value and assigned value. Held values and assigned values are explicit concepts and actions that arise from and carry forward felt value in the same way that appropriate words or actions carry forward felt senses in general.

I have come to see value as a *process* that has its basis in our implicit, bodily relatedness to the world instead of in abstract concepts about what is good. All living beings have this bodily world-relatedness and therefore all living beings, not just humans, have valuing as an aspect of their basic life process (Schroeder, 2006). Abstract concepts of what is good or bad (held values) are a uniquely human development, which has emerged from the more fundamental process of valuing that we share with all other living things. This process-oriented perspective on valuing acknowledges both the ways in which human beings are similar to other living things and the important ways in which we are unique.

The process of valuing is closely tied to decision-making and choice. Therefore, a shift in our understanding of the concept of value has practical consequences for the process by which environmental management decisions are made. Decision-making approaches in the field of environmental management often ignore or pass over the implicit, felt dimension of value, and instead seek to make decisions by means of rational, mathematical models. Felt value plays no direct role in this kind of decision-making approach. Instead, value is treated

as an abstract quantity, and decisions are reached by carrying out numerical calculations on a computer. This is a good method for some purposes, but it often fails to deal adequately with the complex feelings, perceptions, and meanings inherent in people's relationships to the environments and places in which they live, work, and recreate.

In the field of environmental management, complex people-place relationships have been subsumed under the name "sense of place". I am presently writing a chapter for a book on sense of place and decision-making, in which I argue that sense of place is in fact a *felt* sense of place. Hence, to include sense of place in environmental decision-making requires that the decision-making process not by-pass, ignore, or lose touch with the felt value of places. The participants in decision-making need a means for directly connecting with and drawing upon their implicit, felt level of experience as decisions about places are being made. Using practices like Focusing and Collaborative Edge Decision Making (McGuire, 2007) in an environmental decision process could help those involved in decision-making to stay in touch with felt value, so that a decision that respects everybody's sense of place might be sought (Schroeder, 2008b).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have summarized the ways in which Eugene Gendlin's experiential psychology and philosophy of the implicit have influenced my thinking and my work in environmental psychology. I think that environmental psychology and experiential psychology can both benefit from a crossing of ideas and methods between these two fields.

On the one hand, much environmental psychology research has been carried out from the detached stance of natural science, in which the researcher seeks to be an objective, uninvolved observer and analyst of the interactions between people and their environments. Experiential psychology and the philosophy of the implicit open a doorway into the first-person, experiential dimension. They remind me that, as an environmental psychology researcher, I am not only an observer but also an instance of what I observe. Each of us has within us the bodily world-relatedness that underlies human interactions with environments. Experiential practices like Focusing give us direct access to an awareness of this implicit domain, enabling us to ground our theories about values and perceptions of natural environments in a first-hand knowledge of our own ongoing relationship to the environment.

On the other hand, paying attention to the felt sense of the immediately perceived environment introduces a new dimension to experiential practices like Focusing and TAE. You can explore this for yourself by Focusing not only on your thoughts and feelings about nature in the abstract, but on the felt sense that arises from your immediate, perceptual contact with an environment while you are actually in it. When you attend to the intricate feelings evoked by sensory contact with the environment — the sound of the wind blowing through pine branches, the warmth of the sun on your face, the pattern of ripples on the surface of a pond, the smell of summer rain, the soaring arc of a bird's flight against a background of slowly shifting clouds — your body's ongoing, implicit engagement with its

physical surroundings may become a source of (perhaps surprising) insights into how you are related to the world in which you live.

Focusing on the felt senses of environments has made me acutely aware that there is a radical difference in how I experience artificial and natural environments. Natural environments carry my inward felt process forward in ways that artificial environments do not. It seems to me that there are facets of my life process that remain stopped in artificial environments and that resume only when I return to a natural place — a place where the intrinsic process of the environment carries forward, unconstrained by imposed human patterns. Why my own intrinsic process resonates with the intrinsic process of nature in this way is still something of a mystery to me. Exploring this mystery is a continuing source of fascination and delight.

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PASSAGEWAY INTO THE IMPLICIT

Nada Lou

Focusing as a philosophical practice has gone through a fine, long nourishing period of being sustained inside the psychotherapy milieu. Its therapeutic values were recognized, developed, acknowledged, used, written about and esteemed.

Then, at the end of the millennium “Thinking at the Edge” (TAE) appeared at the edge of the familiar Focusing scene. At first many of us felt bewildered: “What is Gene doing to my safe focusing ‘crutch’?” was my first reaction. For a long time Focusing was THE philosophical practice through which some took a glimpse at Gendlin’s Philosophy of the Implicit. But very quickly, as I started to learn, use and explore TAE, I confirmed something I knew intuitively — the philosophy from which Focusing emerged has a lot more to offer. TAE became known as the second Philosophical practice. The touchstone for both is the *felt sense*, but the two practices connect to the felt sense for a different purpose.

This is where a fresh new journey into the Philosophy of the Implicit started for me. I came to the conclusion that this might be a way to go because experiencing is the key for gaining understanding about this field, but philosophical grounding authenticates its strength.

I must say that through the years of listening to Gene, by videotaping, editing and teaching, my initial grounding in his philosophy was more organic than academic. I consider myself exceptionally privileged to receive the gift of his wisdom and genius via this route.

In recent years as I began to take teaching of both practices, Focusing and TAE, around the world, I spontaneously put a bit of Philosophy of the Implicit Entry into the syllabus in order to distinguish between those two philosophical practices. This inclusion invited me to open out of my comfort zone and find my own Passageway into the Implicit.

Finding a passageway by simply reading the text of *A Process Model* (1997) has not been an easy way for many of us to start our study. There are easier texts from which to gaze into Gendlin’s mind, and in fact, there are numerous texts from which to study many aspects of the Philosophy of the Implicit. Gendlin’s prolific bibliography is huge. But eventually many of us reroute in the direction of slowly and carefully reading each line of *A Process Model*. I experienced a love/bafflement relationship for a long time until its concepts started to sink in! It is not that his philosophy is inventing something new. The ‘new’ is there to be grasped by crafting a philosophy that is able to contain concepts by which life forward direction is implicitly visible.

A Process Model is the comprehensive work in which Gendlin slowly builds up new concepts in a systematic manner, so that he can show how every living body implies the next steps of its own life process. In his amazing scheme, he envisions a new order of living process in which “focusing humans”, through felt sensing, are able to open their vistas into

new ways of relating with themselves and the life around them. A “focusing human” carries life forward in its own implied direction.

I consider myself philosophically inclined rather than officially trained. Looking back at my humble philosophical fascination of Gendlin’s philosophy, I remember, a few years ago, sharing a story with Gene about my interview with an Australian Aboriginal lady. This interview was impressive because it gave a living instance of some of Gendlin’s philosophical concepts, such as environment # 2, implying into occurring, interaction first, stoppage, and the nature of language and *the more that I can sense...but can not yet say...*

Several years ago while visiting Australia, I looked for an opportunity to find out more about Australian Aborigines. The meaning of their “Walkabouts” and word “Dadirri” was inviting me to explore. I was fortunate to videotape a long interview with an Aboriginal lady, Maisie, who was willing to pass on many stories. Out of her sharing, I gained a profound sense of understanding of “interaction first” and “implying”.

She told me this story: “As a very young child, my family decided to move to Sydney to avoid political policies of that time. We had to leave the land we belong to. Throughout my childhood my mother kept taking us back by train to the land we belong to, and taught us how to be nourished so we could learn from a deeper level what it means to be an Aboriginal. I was schooled in Sydney, but I was educated when I went with mom to the land we belong to.”

As she mentioned this phrase “the land we belong to” several more times, I asked her to explain to me what she meant by it.

“*‘Belonging and Kinship with the land’* are operational words for this experience,” she said, “but they come from the wordless reality, and any word is always painfully short to give authentic expression for non-aboriginals to understand. There is pain in it because the view is that if it cannot be expressed, it might not be that important either. This of course is not true because having a kinship with this kind of awareness, you come from a different psychology, a different position.”

“Walkabout is like pilgrimage”, she said, as she described some of their walkabouts. “My mother would take us to the land we belong to. To get us ready for the experience to learn how to ‘walk’ and how to ‘listen’, she first stopped us from talking. Listening was not with the ears; instead we observed, absorbed, moved around, noticed — and detected hidden meaning through sounds, smells, every feature of the landscape around us. Every feature of the landscape has its worth. She told us not to kick stones because they have their own worth. My father reminded us about this ‘kinship’ in droughts. He taught us to be kind to everything around us because drought is affecting everyone. I see the landscape having a story to it; it has a meaning; it has a life. This story is my story. The only way to build this relationship is to have love for it.

“Silence and stillness made an impact for the rest of my life that gave me the key to understanding where and how I belong in the scheme of things. This is the meaning of Dadirri — it comes with that inner stillness, but you have to come to that stillness to be able to receive the story. If we can take a coat off our conditioning and open up to take the feel-

ing vibes from the environment around us, we understand that we are part of the same thing. This deep knowing is the most important thing in my life.”

The point of this story is not about the educational style, but the “instance” of such an experience. She was taught how to experience herself as a part and participant of a reality that is bigger than herself, of which she is an integral part. That interaction with her environment (or any environment we belong to for that matter) already exists — it is only the recognition of this interaction that she was learning to be aware of. We don’t create it or imagine it — the situation is already there. It exists and it implies more. When she was in the bush, she felt “whole”, because she was in the environment that she belonged to (unseparated multiplicity interaffecting each other). It is not that she got lost in it and identified with it. It is the other way around — she already knew herself as a “separate”, “individual”, untangled from the whole event, but going back into the bush she was able to experience herself as more AND herself in it. It is different understanding, differently organized (Lou, 2004).

Whenever I spend time with this story, I experience more appreciation for my own understanding of the profundity of Gendlin’s Philosophy and my continuing enthusiasm to share it with others. This woman spoke out of her experience of being a part of the whole interaffecting event. With this example and several below, I want to illustrate and help reader get the *feel* for why Focusing is possible, why TAE opens a fresh approach to language and thinking, and how each person is capable of creating a First Person Science. When we Focus, we tap into this kind of implicit order. When we do TAE, we tap into it as well. Entry into the Implicit makes Focusing and TAE possible. We learn how to be in a relationship with something that is already there, but is also at the implied edge of a “not yet formed.” This is a difficult concept to buy! To have a relationship with something that does not yet exist seems absurd to our scientific minds. Yet this kind of relationship, this mode of being with something that is not clear is *just that difference that makes it work!*

Philosophical redefinition of what Gendlin means by “body” is vital to begin study of his Philosophy. Gendlin points to the fact that words don’t have fixed meaning. This applies to the word “body” as well. It also applies to a large topic about the language in his philosophy, and so I will try to put some light on this difficult concept so the use of words and source of language could be understood better in this article.

Language that is used in everyday life has established meaning. Everybody understands (and often misunderstands) what one is saying — it seems. But when one Focuses or does TAE work, what comes from the felt sensing is fresh and has new meaning. What comes — (the “IT” or “...”) does not have words yet — it is not yet articulated. New symbolization comes from the body’s implied meaning, and any ‘*public word*’ for that new meaning does not adequately represent this new(ly) forming meaning. When Gendlin uses the word “body”, he means something more complex than what this word means in public language.

So the usual meaning of the word “body” needs to be given another look.

I took Gendlin’s article “Three Assertions about the Body” to help me make my points (Gendlin, 1993). These three subtitles will lead me through my own TAE formation of this article:

- THE SITUATIONAL BODY
- WE HAVE PLANT BODIES
- THE BODY IMPLIES ITS RIGHT NEXT STEP

THE SITUATIONAL BODY

Body knows the situation — feeling comfortable or not comfortable. You can sense what is behind you. Here are some simple examples of this.

Let's imagine — when you arrive at a Conference or a crowded party of some kind, you get a sense of the place and people. You might have an experience of running into people that you definitely knew from before, but you cannot “place” them — you can not remember their name, or where you met them before, but you have a definite sense “about” them. If you touched into that sense it would probably not be clear — but there might be something like *pleasant* or *unpleasant*; or *I'd better not get too close*; or *I really want to reconnect*. If somebody asked you how that is, you would have a *sense of it* — rather than clear information.

Let's say you open your computer and see in your Inbox an e-mail from somebody. This is not just about the e-mail you received — you know that it might contain a reply to your last e-mail, you know that the person who wrote is such and such, and you feel so and so about her, and before you even met her you heard (about her) that she is not easy to be with. Then there is your computer that is loaded with other e-mails...and the room you work in. *All of that* is a part of this moment you see her e-mail.

All of that IS your body — IS that SITUATIONAL body, and it implies complexity and intricacy. Body carries — is — an implicit intricacy of the situation. Experientially it is unseparated multiplicity. It is “THAT”.

The Australian Aboriginal's story above is an intricate instance of the Situational body. To have the experience of the “Land we belong to”, Maisie's body *implied everything* that was part of this situation. So her body — in this situation — implies, IS the rocks and kangaroos hopping around and snakes and dry land and silence and (“...”).

In Gendlin's words:

— Experience is *felt* rather than spoken or visual — it is not words or images, but a *bodily sense*.

— It does not fit the common names or categories of feelings. It is a unique sense of this person or this situation.

— Although such a body-sense comes as one feeling, we can sense that it contains intricacy.

— A situation always involves some living thing that is in the process of organizing its further living.

WE HAVE PLANT BODIES

We live in the culture in which there is one predominant model by which we observe ourselves and the world around us. We call it the Scientific model or Unit model. There are others; we are aware of them to certain degrees — but they don't have as dominant a status as the Unit model.

We assume that what we know comes to us through our five senses. It does. It comes to us as one or another kind of information, and we collect all these little units together and sort them out to put together a piece of information or a concept. We took parts/units and made a whole of it.

You have to write your exam paper; you go on the Internet, read books, take notes, hear lectures, sort out facts and data, put them together and hand them in. This is true — this is one way that the information comes to us, is processed and passed on.

But this is not the only way that the body knows. Many human experiences are actually internally complex, wider and richer. The Unit model has no tools or words or concepts to handle such intricate experiences. Take an experience of a beautiful sunset, or holding a newborn baby, or the coffee you shared with your friend. The word body KNOWS is gaining a different meaning as we progress into this Philosophy.

Look at a beautiful flower in your garden or any living plant that you encounter. It does not have five senses, yet it knows where to find a bit of earth, enough sunshine and moisture, and the right kind of nutrition to live on this particular spot. The interacting of just that much of sun and earth and wind and temperatures and iron and other chemicals and water IS this plant. It IS its own living.

I have in front of me a beautiful photo of a flowering vine I took last year on vacation. They grow in Croatia on the Island of Korcula where Marko Polo was born. They have a name — bougainvillea — they are Mediterranean/tropical flowering shrubs. You can find out more about them on Wikipedia. This kind of information is scientific information. This plant needs sunshine, nutrients, water, other chemicals, Mediterranean/ tropical climate, and so on. In Unit model each one of these elements could be identified separately. An observer can see it, a scientist can study and classify it, and group it into kinds — very useful knowledge! We need this kind of information for our lives to run smoothly.

But bougainvilleas don't need to know all of that! They don't need to have this information. They KNOW what they are. They know how to grow where the climate and environment provide and support them to be a bougainvillea. This kind of knowing is REFLEXIVELY IDENTICAL with each organism's living process. Thus, it could be explained that the bougainvillea and its environment are one process. How is this possible? This water, those chemicals, that kind of heat, so much sunshine, such wind — all of that — contributes to making this bougainvillea the way it is. All of this is one event or one process or unseparated multiplicity. The bougainvillea is not just bougainvillea, but it implies...*more...* the wind that moves it, the water and nutrients that nourish it, the sun that makes it grow. They are *reflexively identical*.

It might be helpful to the reader to pause for a moment to do a little exercise in observation and assessment: Think about which is your favorite flower or vegetable or tree... sense inside — stand up — sense how it would be if all is well and fine. Sense the drought and wilting, and then also a sudden drenching. You might have some fun, but also hopefully, an experience of a knowing of different kind.

Here is another example that might bring more clarity to this concept. Here is an interesting fact about the gum tree. (Eucalyptus). In a very harsh climate and often unforgiving droughts, these trees know how to preserve themselves. When the droughts are prolonged and the tree is in a danger of dying, it actually trims itself by dropping a whole big branch off. It *implies its own further living* by eliminating excess, without which it cannot continue its life. Nobody told it to do that. *It knows.*

So never park your car below a gum tree!

When I said above that Maisie (the Aboriginal lady) IS her situation — she is who she is — *and* — she is also rocks and land and silence and listening — (in a certain way, because all of these participate in her living process in this particular situation). So reflexively the land — and all about it in that situation — are also Maisie. It is one unseparated event.

This kind of KNOWING is implicit in all living bodies — plants and bugs and animals and humans. Through Focusing and TAE, humans deliberately chose to get in touch with this implicit knowing (felt sense) which carries life forward in its own direction. In terms of A Process Model, a Focusing human is the beginning of next (new) order.

ALL LIVING THINGS ARE ALSO THIS INFORMATION

Now bear with me as I try to convey this philosophical curl. If I succeed, you will be a lot closer to the reply about *why Focusing works!*

Animals and everything more complex than plants — including humans — have and are made of this same PLANT-like information. Just as plants make themselves out of an environment that supports them (interacting within their environment), animals also make themselves out of the food they eat, the sun they take, the oxygen they breathe. Their bodies imply their own living. They also have the five senses. What they get from five senses comes into the already existing plant kind of body. The already more complex body is further elaborated and modified. The five senses don't make the animal body, they elaborate and modify the living.

The human body — your body — is also at least this plant body. The language, behavior, consciousness are elaborations of tissue processes.

Living is always a fresh forming. There is a kind of consciousness that has all this forming implied in it already. The tissue process, behavior, language and focusing comes from this kind of implicit consciousness (Gendlin on DVD "Some Philosophical Concepts").

THE BODY IMPLIES ITS RIGHT NEXT STEP

EVERY LIVING BODY IMPLIES THE NEXT STEPS OF ITS LIFE-PROCESS.

Have you ever experienced the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon? You are looking for the word that somehow you know will say what you want to say, but the word does not come. You have it and you don’t have it. It will not work if you try to use some other word that is “close”. You cannot will it to come. Your felt sense won’t let you do that. It comes by itself. Because “...” the body implies the next step.

The body implies its further living. One very simple example is the newborn baby and mother’s milk. Milk arrives into the mother’s breast only at the time when there is a baby to suck it. The mother does not consciously “order” milk to emerge; neither does the baby have to take a course in how to suck. So it can be said that the baby implies milk in mother’s breast — and in the same way — that milk implies a baby who will suck it.

Body implies its further living. With Focusing we tap into this *whole body implied meaning* which in turn forms *the knowing* of its further life forward direction.

Gendlin points out that Albert Einstein said he was led towards his theory of relativity by a “feeling” that guided him to stay on the track. He apparently stayed in this “KNOWING, BUT NOT KNOWING” for about 15 years. His knowledge of math and physics, of course, were important tools that facilitated him in elaborating THAT, also known as “...” a “felt sense” or “direct referent.”

IN THE NOT KNOWING THERE IS KNOWING

This interesting paradox needs a creation of space in which one can pause to allow something new to come. It is truly a creative, generative space where everything is possible, but only what occurs into the *implied* will bring the “Aha, Yes!” Focusing practice is reliant on providing such space. TAE practice, thinking from the felt sense, and generating new concepts emerge in that mode.

At the Montreal International this year, I opened my presentation with a beautiful Beatles song “*Because the world is round it turns me on*”. The version I used was one of a unique recording — the Beatles singing a cappella.

Preparing for my presentation at the 2008 Montreal International is an example of such a TAE evolving process. The beautiful Beatles’ song “Because the world is round it turns me on” captivated me, and every time I listened to it, the presentation would come to my mind, along with the need to prepare it. Every time I started to write something down, I had a real body feel of voices blending harmonies from that song. I did not have the connection, but I knew there was a link. The sound and subtleties of voices interacting with each other were crossing with my ideas, creating an environment for deeper exploratory work. I started to think about each Beatle as a person, and how their lives happen to interact at a time when the music scene of the world was ready to receive them. That gave me this whole idea about how “interaction” produced Beatles. Like bougainvilleas and the nutrients and wind are one process, so the Beatles and their voices interacting with each other are one process. They imply each other.

From our unit-trained minds and perspectives, we could say that the four young men got together, called themselves the Beatles and wrote this song — and many other songs — and became popular and rich. But where did this music come from? Is it that they said, “Oh, we are just going to get together, sit down and write ‘Because the world is round it turns me on’ and get rich and popular?”

Anyone who ever produced something creatively knows that it does not work that way. You have music implied in your bones, in your sense, but to compose a song or write a poem or paint a picture — it is at this *edge* that you sense where it should go, where you want it to go — but you don’t have it yet. It is implied — and from within — it is an intricate space, much richer and more complex territory that implies — but oh so precisely — ‘just that sound’, ‘just that harmony’, ‘just those words’ would do. You try this and you try that and you make a pause — to make a space for something to come. When the shift comes the fit feels perfect. The fit feels perfect and the shift comes. And there is an AHA!

Music, which was not yet formed, was implied in each of these talented young men. Through their interacting the song was created. The implied music and talents and situation carried forward (explicated) a new song. It is the interaction of their implied music, just that particular music, and these particular lyrics, and with these particular youngsters that formed the Beatles. Beatles are the outcome — so to speak — of their implied talents and opportunities that occurred into their implying.

There is more — further implying. Nobody could have predicted the impact they made on the world of music. Somehow the Beatles were writing songs that touched the nerve of their generation — and beyond and still. Something was implied in the public arena as well, that their music *occurred into*. That is what made the “Fab Four.”

Again, I would ask the reader to take a moment to sense this. Try to remember the time when something like this was true for you. A ‘creative time’ of your own that brought a rewarding result. Remember the process?

“Living is always a fresh forming including thinking and talking and Focusing. And this fresh forming is all the way from cells up” (Gendlin in Lou, 2008).

In conclusion, I’d like to share some pointers about Focusing and TAE.

These two practices are similar in many ways and different in others. What is common is the philosophy which generated them and the Felt Sense as the touchstone. The two practices have a different purpose for dwelling in the Felt Sense.

Although these are artificial divisions, they might be helpful to see that these two practices are different, yet when you know both, you draw from both.

Focusing is personal. Nobody needs to know what you got in touch with, or what shifted — it is about you for yourself (but the results also affect the people around you).

TAE is social. TAE helps you to think from the felt sense. Thinking from the felt sense is always fresh, always more and always about something for which you have a knowing, but have no words to express — *yet*. There is a desire to develop that ‘it’ freshly, and to communicate *it* credibly.

Through TAE one creates “The First Person Science.” If you develop some new concepts or theories that come from your thinking out of your felt sense — they can add to, elaborate, change the existing science and social order in many ways. What you know in this way must be true because *you are living it*.

Focusing is a quest for resolution. TAE is finding the way to articulate from what you know at the edge of awareness. The First Person Science is your developed knowing capable of bringing fresh growth into old concepts.

As I am putting finishing touches on this article, an exciting felt-ness is emerging. On the other side of this Passageway, the implicit veracity is budding. Every time in our lives that we experience some kind of stoppage, there is also the faint sense that something fresh is forming. At that edge, there is a real choice — to ignore it or to explore it. I infer that the invitation is towards the latter. Focusing and TAE offer a genuine Passageway into fresh exploration. And when the AHA! occurs, I am amazed that inevitably something fresh comes that fits perfectly into something I did not know was missing.

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ON A BOOK OF HOPE *A Process Model*

Tadayuki Murasato

Recently, I made three presentations on the philosophy of Eugene Gendlin (Murasato, 2006 and 2007), in which I discussed not only Gendlin's philosophy but also that of Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945). I believe they have something in common in terms of aim and theoretical viewpoint. A goal of this current essay is to introduce the nearness of Gendlin's philosophy to Nishida's. This nearness suggests their universality and thus might be encouraging for us, especially the Japanese community. Nishida showed us another model. I will discuss who Nishida was, and how he thought and wrote his philosophy from his felt sense or direct referent.

Gendlin (1997a) wrote in the "Conclusion and Beginning" of Chapter VIII in *A Process Model*:

From now on each new topic will be permitted to raise its own facets, not just those our model would lead to in "applying" to it, and will also be in IOFI space (Instance OF Itself), not in our model (p. 276).

Therefore, it is important to show that there is another philosophy that will give us the foundation upon which we can stand and go forward.

Finally, I want to try to show that *A Process Model* is a book of hope because it shows us how we are able to find our own ways into our good future.

I

I have kept in my mind a very serious issue centered on whether we are able to find a new way with which we can open a new vista of the future. I want to pursue this by following Gendlin's concepts with the question: Can our age in practice have a way to open the VIII of his *A Process Model*? ('VIII' is used as a term that refers to the content of chapter VIII, namely *direct-referent-formation* and its function in IOFI space. I want to state that we have possibilities for answering "yes" to this question.

We have faced a challenge as to how to live in this "after postmodern times" with hope for the future. Many thinkers in the world have denied that there is any hope with which we could live strongly in the post-World War II world, at such juncture that modern times ended and the contemporary age began.

Gendlin is not pessimistic about future because he has advocated for a new way of thinking and living after postmodern times. I think that *Focusing* (Gendlin, 1981) and Think-

ing at the Edge [TAE] (Gendlin, 2004) should be applied to many more fields and themes than ever before. The scope of our applications of *A Process Model* should be extended beyond individual problems. The pace of progress of our inner life might not have caught up with the needs of our contemporary age. I want to start from showing we have a few good philosophies, enough to tackle these difficult problems.

Gendlin (1997b) wrote of his *continuous philosophy*: “How can one be Plato, and Aristotle and more...? We stand on their shoulder, and Kant’s too, Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s and many more. If you really understand, you always move beyond” (p. 278). I asked Gendlin if he knew Nishida. He answered: “Only his name.” I want to add Nishida to the list of important philosophies and explain why it is relevant to the Focusing community.

II

In the introduction to the Japanese edition of *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy* (1996), Gendlin explains that he thinks Focusing is more familiar in Japan than in the West, and that the philosophy that produced Focusing is also familiar to traditional Japanese culture. I want to clarify why this is true from the viewpoint of Japanese traditional culture, and especially the representative philosopher of modern Japan, Kitaro Nishida.

Gendlin said Focusing and TAE (a new way of creative thinking that often uses Focusing) are produced from his philosophy of the implicit from within the body. I have practiced and taught Focusing and TAE in Japan and read Gendlin’s and Nishida’s philosophy for more than ten years. There seems to be a kind of the coincidence of things between their philosophies. I find, underlying these philosophies, a similar need to overcome difficulties derived from modern Western culture, which dominates much of the world. Nishida and Gendlin recognized that their respective historical contexts urged them to find a breakthrough in the difficulties arising from Western modern thought and technology. They sought to establish a solid ground on which we can make a new world where we can live free of anxiety; namely, living with a new, sound understanding of ourselves as human beings rather than living as things.

Nishida started from his “pure experience”, which means an experience *before* thinking, which he believed to be the basis for understanding our world and ourselves. Since the Meiji Restoration (1867), modern Japan had encountered difficulties integrating her success in introducing Western technologies and her traditional self-understanding. In those days, Japan was in a crisis over her identity. It is said that only in Nishida’s Eastern cultural tradition, the West truly met her reflection for the very first time. His philosophical aim was to explain everything from the viewpoint that *pure experiences are the only one reality*.

I think Nishida’s is a highly practical philosophy in the sense that it endeavors to build a new and more profound basis or openness in which we can truly have both Western values and Japanese culture. He said, “In the Eastern culture there seems to be a profound difference. When Western modern philosophy and Eastern Zen Buddhism can find a more

profound basis on which both can truly live, we might be able to fully develop our humanity through them supplementing each other” (Nishida, p. 406).

Nishida developed his unique thinking uncompromisingly, along with his key terms such as “jikaku” (self consciousness) and “basyo” (place or space). These terms were carefully developed after a rather long period of contemplation in order to *open the openness*, and let his concepts lay the foundation for them. Let me explain these key terms by referring to Ueda Shizuteru (1994), a respected interpreter of Nishida’s philosophy.

Our self as “a predicative unity” (whose self is “monadological individual” a “historical body” and the selves are the elements as “an individual against another individual” who form our world) is in “basyo” (a place or a space), which is both a place of being (our world) and a place of an absolute nothing (infinite margin of our world). And the way of our being is “action intuition” and the logic of the basyo is “absolute-contradictory-self-identity” (p. 29).

These terms are quite difficult to understand, because they came from his challenge to cleave his way through our unforeseeable time — meaning it is not easy to see the direction of the future. His thinking was metaphysical, but at the same time it was very practical in order to keep connection with the real world. In this regard, his philosophy is related to Gendlin’s philosophy.

For example, both Gendlin and Nishida use similar words: “monad”, “body”, “space” — as their important terms. Nishida’s other terms are also very close to Gendlin’s in their contents. For example, “a predicative unity” relates to “the implicit”, and “action intuition” relates to “felt sense” or “direct referent”.

Merleau-Ponty (1964, *Signes* (translated in Japanese Vol.1, p. 194) once referred to “a wild sphere” that is not involved in its own culture and therefore can be crossed with each other. This wild sphere seems to correspond to the pure experience that Nishida called *basyo* (a place or a space in our body) and that Gendlin called the *implicit*. Furthermore, what functions as body for Gendlin is comparable to “action intuition” by Nishida, and to “direct referent” or “felt sense” by Gendlin. I want to emphasize that Nishida’s philosophy, which built a firm bridge over the deep gulf between Western rational reflection and Eastern body-wisdom, is one of the new ways of thinking that Gendlin envisages.

Of course, there are clear differences between them. They have had different contexts in their thinking: Gendlin comes from the Western tradition of philosophy, namely *philosophy of Being*, and Nishida from the Eastern tradition, the *philosophy of Nothingness*. Nevertheless, many of their terms that are seemingly opposite, such as Gendlin’s “evolution” and Nishida’s “historical work” or Gendlin’s Being and Nishida’s Negation or Nothingness are not contrary to each other’s ways of thinking.

Therefore, we can expect an important crossing will occur between the two philosophies. In Gendlin’s terms, we can say the two philosophies have their own *implying* or *possibility* and can make an important crossing in our history. However, why do these crossings happen? I want to explain this dynamic, using Nishida’s terms and Gendlin’s. Our selves

are “individuals against individuals” in Nishida’s terms, and have their “own implyings into which things occur”, in Gendlin’s terms. Our selves respond or cross over to their environments or the universe. Our environments, histories, and the universe, also cross over to us through our bodies. If we are close to our more profound wild sphere, our interactions will come to be more alive and demonstrate coincidences of things beyond the differences of our own contexts, thus many crossings will occur there.

Inspired by Gendlin, I intend to cross their philosophies, which will evolve to be one of a continuous philosophy. If we continue to do such crossings, a better world will be able to come true. Therefore we can say that we might be able to change our world into a better one to live in, through using their philosophies applied to our own practice.

III

Let me now make a closer examination into Nishida and Gendlin’s thoughts with the focus on action-intuition and direct referent.

A Japanese Philosopher, Yujiro Nakamura (1992) wrote:

Nishida’s “action-intuition” has deep connections with clinical knowing in a broader sense. In three respects Action-intuition will contribute to making a foundation of the clinical knowing. First: It understands action and intuition not as one way activity but as interaction between this and that. Second: Looking through action means actually looking through body, through which one can find most concrete knowing — such as radical experiences. Third: Looking through action and body is accomplished by “historical body” (the concept is one of Nishida’s philosophical terms (pp.138-140).

History refers to not only that of human beings but also that of organisms. This concept corresponds to Gendlin’s “evolution” in *A Process Model*. Action-intuition itself is carried out only in its historical world. Nishida’s action-intuition significantly influenced the broader view of biology and its theoretical foundations as structured by Kinji Imanishi (a famous biologist in Japan). He believed in many of Nishida’s concepts such as “pure experience” or “action-intuition,” to be very useful tools for his biological study. Nishida’s action-intuition also gives us clues to the finding and the making of hidden meanings of “clinical knowing” in the fields of clinical psychology and cultural anthropology, etc.

Nishida (1937) wrote in his essay titled *Action-Intuition*, “Action-intuition: not Plotinos’ intuition nor Bergson’s pure sequences but a basis for truly actual knowing and all empirical knowledge” (p.1). To establish objective knowledge, action-intuition should inevitably let the knowing occur in the historical world (in Nishida’s term). Our action must have developed historically from instinctive behavior through interactions between a subject and its environments in the way of the unity of opposites. This unity of opposites (literally translated as absolutely-opposite-self identity) forms and creates everything new in the historical view. Action occurs — since we live in the world of things which must be seen

in relation to dialectics. For this purpose, Nishida modified Hegel's Dialektik — that is to say, he thought of action-intuition as “dialectical general”. The world as a historical present is thoroughly determined by its past, but contains self-negation in itself and goes from the present to the present in which our action occurs. Our actions are inherently species-specific and occur, since we look to things with our action-intuition, namely with our body sense. In this historically proceeding world, subjective individuals define their environments and the environments define the individuals.

“Species make their environments,” says Nishida (1937), which means that we as individuals govern ourselves in our environments, and that species themselves are altered and denied by their environments, and vice versa. Also, the world — that which species and environments make up together — in turn, makes itself individually. There, our body is constructed, and we as historical individuals see things with our action-intuition. Inevitably we must continue to construct our environments and ourselves historically. In other words, we become human through our historical makings.

It was Bin Kimura (1989), a psychiatrist and psychopathologist, who first applied Nishida's philosophy to get a more precise understanding of psychopathology. He used Nishida's term “action-intuition” in order to better understand the many complaints of his patients. Kimura (1985) pointed out, in respect to the relation between philosophy and psychotherapy, that “the error of the separation between subject and object, which had dominated psychology (therefore psychopathology), was removed on the grounds that Heidegger thought of In-der-Welt-sein as transcendency and the unity of Da-sein and the world was produced,” (p.20). He quoted Heidegger, “The fact that Da-sein transcends means that it forms its world in its real nature and gives it a radical insight (a picture) with its world. The insight works just as its ‘pre-picture’ for all the explicit beings including the Da-sein” (1955, p. 97). From this viewpoint psychopathologists such as Binswanger could talk about transformations of In-der- Welt-sein, which his patients experienced.

This “pre-picture” is implicit and has felt meaning. Its function might be called “monad” according to Gendlin. We may have one or three monads according to our being and our problems. But Heidegger could not get to the importance of the body sense. Gendlin said to me once that Heidegger only mentioned the body of our being in his term “Wohnen” (to live) in his late writings (personal communications from TAE workshop in NY). Heidegger's terminology does not make clear sense of our body.

Unlike Heidegger, Nishida referred to the “historical body”, placing a special emphasis on the actuality and embodiment of our being. He even took the same approach to “history”, having been influenced by historicism, a theory prevalent in his day that posits: events are determined or influenced by conditions and inherent processes beyond the control of humans. Therefore he might have undervalued the creative function of *the body*.

On the other hand, Gendlin criticized Foucault's historicism in the respect that our body is not utterly pre-determined. The body, of course, has many contexts in our actual life, but these contexts are not completely pre-determined. In contrast, they are open and cross with each other. This crossing is the space of a new creation. Nishida showed us the actual existence of our world, illustrating an *us* in unseparated interaction — which

is a quite different viewpoint from the modern European way of thinking. His aim was to explain everything in a quite new way beyond any differences between the West and the East in culture and history. To that end, Nishida referred to the creative function of our body, but he could not show us how we use our body to find new ways of creation. It is Gendlin's truly new contribution to our world that has made it clear how our body functions in our creative working.

IV

I want to explain Gendlin's philosophy, especially his *A Process Model*, by giving a rough sketch of its philosophical and historical context. The context in which Gendlin found himself posed the same difficulty as that which confronted contemporary Western philosophies in general. Two main forms of Western philosophy, analytic and existential, seem to have both run into an aporia, (uncertainty or skeptical doubt), which might be called Postmodernism. It seems that the former got to nothingness, whereas the latter got to arbitrariness.

Gendlin and his colleagues from certain philosophical circles held a conference called After Postmodernism at University of Chicago in 1997. Below are some sentences reflecting Gendlin's way of thinking from *A Report* issued after the conference:

- We are developing a language across the texts.
- Theory and practice open each other.
- Human bodies "know" by inhabiting their interactive situations and the universe.
- New conceptual models are welcome as tools within a wider context.
- A new kind of truth and objectivity.

Guided by Gendlin's concepts, we can develop our own instances of re-thinking. For example, we have developed a reliable method of qualitative research, both in practice and in theoretical viewpoint (Murasato, 2008). Both in our interviews and interpretations of transcripts, we often use our felt sense and arrive at our interviewee's implicit context more exactly. Coding is an especially difficult point for every method of qualitative research. I use the 7th step of TAE and find out patterns in the important parts of the transcript of an interview session. Patterns don't drop out the details of the parts because it is not an abstraction of the protocol as other methods like Grounded Theory do. (Grounded Theory, according to Wikipedia, "is a qualitative research technique where instead of starting with a theory, the researcher begins with the data and uses the data to generate a theory. Starting with a theory before analyzing the data is not allowed. The theory is not created from analyzing research literature, but from systematically analyzing the data through both inductive and deductive reasoning.")

I have taught my graduate students this method. I've found that it is very useful not only in their research training, but also in their clinical training since it improves their

clinical sensitivity. In our project, we have already had encouraging outcomes. Theoretically too, we can apply Gendlin's "three universals" (1997a) to the issue of validity. Gendlin states: "A 'universal' is something that 'applies in many 'instances'" (p. 140). A first universal is a "new expression" in a behavior context. A second universal is "seen." Both 1st and 2nd universals are primitive and implicit. The third is a 'universal of the direct referent.' "A direct referent is a new kind of 'symbolization'" (p.247). We can make a universal from a direct referent. This is a very new explanation of 'universal'. Using this concept of universals, we have achieved marvelous consistency in a theory of qualitative research and made a presentation on this at the 8th World conference for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling in 2008.

Campbell Purton (2004) interprets Gendlin's philosophy as follows:

Gendlin believes that our current ways of thinking don't really allow for the existence of human beings in the world. Our current ways of thinking separate the world from what the world means to us.... So to make room for us in the world, the world has to be re-thought. Gendlin's concepts constitute a framework for this re- thinking (p. 137).

This means Gendlin's philosophy is both in the stream of phenomenology and more than that: that is to say, he is also a radical empiricist. Human beings experience themselves and their own environments bodily, not in their intellect alone. Bodily experiencing contains consciousness and unconsciousness and is much nearer to what we experience. Human beings are actually not separated from the bodily felt experience. However, they have been separated in modern Western thinking, even in Freud's thought. It is wrong in a sense. Separating subject from object is a good way of thinking as far as 'things' are concerned. But it does not work when we think of an organism, especially for human beings, just as they are.

But a truth hides itself when another truth comes out, as Heidegger suggested. We can say that Gendlin's philosophy knows and feels the whole of this situation and speaks from it. His theory of our body is also different from most theories and papers presented recently. Other theories might show surprising phenomena about the body, but do not know, feel, and have "the whole of the situation" of the body, as Gendlin posits it. Something new and interesting might happen, but in VII, namely only in an "in-action" way. The "VIII-sequence carries the whole forward, and is the having of the whole," (p.218). Therefore, if the example is of dancing, the VIII-sequence carries forward the whole situation of the dance, as seen in the case of Isadora Duncan. *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* (Gendlin, 1997b), his early seminal book, *A Process Model*, and his many other works, are instances of this re-thinking — and there is marvelous consistency among them.

Now let me roughly follow Gendlin's Direct Referent in VIII of *The Process Model*. After his philosophical hard work on "symbolic process" (VII-A) and "proto-language" (VII-B), Gendlin opens VIII of *The Process Model* with a quotation from Isadora Duncan's *My Life*, and explains what she was doing.

Duncan was seeking something in her body. What was she seeking: something that would make her dance in quite a new way. Of course she could dance in the traditional way of dancing, which belongs to the world of VII that is related to our traditional culture. Duncan was seeking the sequence that could carry forward the whole situation of her dance. "An VIII sequence carries the whole forward and is the having of the whole." There is also the new "feel" of the whole and in a Direct Referent "everything is changed."

Gendlin asks to himself where this Direct Referent happens and answers:

In a new space generated by this new kind of sequence. Even in VII, people feel things in their chest and stomach, that is one "where" and also in their situations, that is another "where". But in VIII a new space opens (p. 220).

This is what distinguishes a VIII sequence. If it does not carry forward with the whole of the situation, it is not VIII sequence, whatever the sequence is. We have to notice that "the whole" is emphasized. When we want to go forward beyond our situation, we have to know the whole of the situation bodily and feel the whole of it. Duncan had to know and feel the whole of the dances that she experienced. Einstein and Stanislavski, whom Gendlin called pioneers of VIII, also knew and felt the whole of their own situations. They did so again and again. Although the results (expressions) of VIII may be simple, if we depict them in VII we may have to use vast expressions and cannot explain them completely. An expression of VIII contains "in itself the entire gamut of complex life phenomena" according to Stanislavsky (p.224).

Gendlin explains how the implicit of the body functions and how a direct referent forms. To open this new sequence, one must stop the sequences of VII and wait for something that is not VII. I suggest that for Nishida this stoppage represents Negation. Negation is not negative but a kind of affirmation.

As we can see in the Duncan's and Stanislavsky's case, not-doing is first of all inevitable in order to open VIII. Then one may be able to get "his whole body's implicit richness of situations and interactions, all changed at once in this particular focal implying now" (p.224).

Further, Gendlin continued to emphasize a very important point: "We need something like this in any life situation, and also in any new theoretical thinking" (1997a, p.224). In any life situation or in any new theoretical thinking, we don't have to give up a much better solution. It is important for us not to give up our solution and put the problem in a right way to be asked. For example, Einstein knew his problem and that his problem could not be solved with his knowledge of mathematics and physics. But he knew "his body, totaling and focalizing all that, formed for him a direct referent which he could feel as such," and "this feeling guided him" at last to "speak from it in terms of physics" 15 years later (p. 224).

Gendlin showed us that the implicit and Direct Referent had helped these three pioneers very strongly, and therefore Focusing and TAE had strong power if we applied it in appropriate ways in many fields. Thus, we can go beyond the VII-world and open a

VIII-place, which will change our ordinary contexts and therefore, we don't have to be pessimistic about our future.

Gendlin goes forward in his philosophical explication in VIII as follows:

"A direct referent does not always form." "Direct Referent comes." "It can come only if we let come" (p. 225).

Nishida wrote that a thing came and illuminated him. And where is he who is illuminated? Where does the occurring like this occurs? Nishida answered "in Basyo." Basyo means a place or a space in the ordinary meaning, but it is an important term of Nishida's philosophy. I think this parallels the use of the term 'space' in VIII of *The Process Model*. Nonetheless, in the both cases, what comes is important to the person, and we can say that here occurs the two phenomena close to each other, although these appear somehow different.

Gendlin has developed a model about the coming of a direct referent and the space into which a direct referent comes, in which the occurring is its result. I think what we have is not a hard way of thinking about the implicit. Gendlin seems to be helped by his experiences in the field of clinical psychology in the respect that his thinking is both phenomenal and metaphysical, and both sides make each other side stronger, although it might make the reading in both fields difficult to understand.

Gendlin explains other important functions of direct referent and its characteristics in the following quotes:

- *The direct referent is a perfect feedback object (p. 236).*
- *The direct referent, the feel of the whole problem, itself is closed and still in formation until suddenly it opens, and "what it is" falls out. "It" has jelled. Now one "knows," though it may then still take some time to find words or actions (p. 234).*
- *So there is a distinction between the direct referent still during formation (as when Duncan waits, the whole thing doesn't feel quite right), and once it formed (p. 234).*

And once it formed, the direct referent is a perfect feed back object. Gendlin explains "how a VIII sequence makes changes in the VII-context." "Each bit of the new sequence is a changed version of the whole VII-context." It "satisfies the requirement" of the problem (p. 245).

Gendlin uses the term "monad" and explains it this way: "Monad is the term I use for how a direct referent applies to everything" (1997a, p. 246). This echoes how Nishida used "monad" as a self: the self as a monad is mirroring the world. And Gendlin uses the term as a verb: "direct referent monad out into everything." Here is a clear difference between the two philosophies: Nishida's is more contemplative and less active than Gendlin's. I guess it is because the latter wants the readers to join in making their own continuous philosophy, and in knowing how to do so, understanding better how to use one's own body.

Gendlin closes *The Process Model* with an impressive heading, “Conclusion and Beginning.” He says that the process model will continue to develop many terms to solve the problems we now have. Gendlin evaluates Plato and Aristotle because they created what their age needed. Gendlin says, “I wish to be my own Plato and Aristotle” (p. 278). We need both method and concepts, and Gendlin thinks it is possible for us to establish our model and prevent beautiful concepts from containing ourselves within VII.

I’d like to conclude my article with the possibility that our opening to our own new possibilities — most likely by individual creation in individual space — opens a new period marked by enormous crossing. Fortunately, we have the philosophers and pioneers who showed us their possibilities in opening their own lives to us — and that we can share together. Our times might have implicitly asked some of us to open the heavy door to quite a new and deep life for human beings in which we can live our inherent possibility.

I have made a sketch of Nishida’s and Gendlin’s philosophy. Both are radical empiricists who found the profound basis from which we can live. I think there are such persons who feel happy when they can open a heavy door into a better human life.

Gendlin especially has explicated the function of the body to create a new way in our personal and public difficulties. The implicit function of the body is not arbitrary, but has its order from which we can find a new way to solve our problems. We have not had such a profound theory of the body until Gendlin explicated it. He foresees that we will be able to have new ways of life such as a new principle of economy, which replaces the principles of the market economy.

Gendlin invites us to go forward into what he calls a continuous philosophy. This message from Gendlin is a hope for us living in this difficult world. Therefore I want to call *A Process Model* “a book of hope”.

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THE NATURE OF OUR EXCEEDING

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It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly.

When I was a young boy, I played frequently in my grandmother's kitchen garden. Her farm was like an exotic foreign land to me, filled with rolling hills, animals in pens, and a huge red barn. Oh, and it was dusty in the summers, very dusty. I played for hours outside or in the barn before being called in by my grandmother for a late afternoon snack. A first generation immigrant from Poland, she would hoist me up on a worn wooden stool next to her butcher-block table, which sat in the middle of her kitchen.

After I was up on the stool, my grandmother would always ask in her heavily accented English, *What's doings Kevin?* 'Doings' was code for her inviting me to say whatever was on my mind. These were no deep philosophical or personal conversations. They were appropriate to my age and our circumstances. I wondered about the hay in the barn; how it got so high up in the lofts. I wondered about a lot of things. These brief conversations were a way for me to explore.

One time I recall her not asking me this. I missed being asked, *What's doings?* Instead, my grandmother increasingly had a far-off look in her eye, and sometimes I thought she'd forgotten who I was or that I was even there. As a boy, I could not know that my grandmother was going senile. My parents noticed something different, too. They eventually kept me away from her, something that brings a certain sadness in me even now as I write this: a sense of longing pulling from in the middle of my chest to finish a conversation.

I knew something had changed — in grandmother, between us, and in my family. It was never to be the same. Today I recognize that 'my relationship' with my grandmother was not only 'mine'. Our relationship was constituted through an intertwining of other relations; some familial, some cultural, some friendships present and past, and of course various forms of tissue process (genetics, cells, etc). I recognize that these various strands had *exceeded* their former form. The word *exceeding* implies and emphasizes the forward leaning direction I believe is inherent in all change, which is not to say that it is necessarily felt as a 'positive' thing.

In the early 1960's, my parents knew nothing of Focusing (Gendlin, 1968) or of Gendlin's philosophy. Of course, neither of these was as fully in the public domain at this time as they are today, nor were my parents the kinds of folks that would have sought out Gendlin's work. They didn't know that I needed to be asked, *What's doings?* — to be invited into continued *saying* (searching and expressing) with my grandmother. Of course, I did not know how to ask either. My parents saw their job as protecting me, and that they did. Now I see that my relationship with my grandmother (with all the strands intertwining) continued

inside me as a stalled life process for many years. It lingered beyond what it would have been *if* the pattern of that relating had been exposed to a *life-forwarding* pattern.

At the time though, I was not yet exposed to such ways of thinking, nor was I capable of these. Through this experience and others, I put together that it must not be right to say what was going on for me when there were no words yet to describe it. I eventually stopped saying what was doing. More so, this now-transfigured form of our relating withheld its original fresh invitation that had characterized it. I had temporarily lost this bit of fresh living in my life where risk-taking and discovery formed my deep appreciation for the changeable.

No surprise then, when it came to larger, emerging life processes, ones no one in my family would or could dare talk about in the open, I could not find my voice. An era of saying what was doing was gone in a certain way. However, that aliveness pattern, which I will call a *saying kind of relating*, did not wither completely. It took many years of experience and a great deal of education and opportunity to open this living pattern again.

Eventually, through reflection on these experiences and others, my education, and especially my exposure to and use of Focusing and ‘Thinking at the Edge’ (Gendlin, 2004a), this current project took shape. The project I’m referring to further refines how we human beings exceed the forms of our living while retaining our sense of continuity. I’m calling this entire thing the *nature of exceeding*. I am particularly interested in the nature of exceeding as it can relate to psychopathology and psychotherapy, although as will be made clearer, this growing theory can be applied to other domains of human living as well.

A BIT ABOUT MY METHOD

I want to very briefly make a note at this point about the overall method of inquiry underlying this article. I am employing what has been called a 1st Person Science approach to discovery (Shear, and Varela, 1999 and Gendlin and Johnson, 2004b). The hallmark of this approach is its emphasis on implicit meaning. Implicit meaning (meaning that is *carried forward* from our *bodily felt sensing*) is more important than explicit (explicated) meaning, although both are key. Implicit meaning carries a much richer sense of the whole than explicit meaning can (Walkerden, 2004).

For Gendlin, *meaning* is a term used specifically, i.e. with specific meaning. For Gendlin, meaning is derived from the vast intricacies of human experiencing, but is not fixed in character. It retains ongoingness, which can be felt by us and used as a new entity that we can follow. This makes ‘felt-meaning’ scientifically useful. In other words, *meaning*, once we call it out from the vastness of *experiencing*, such that it retains its rich, felt, and ongoing intricacy, can become the object of any inquiry. In my developing theory on the nature of change, the meanings called out from the vast experiencing of change are now the focus of my inquiry.

Clark Moustakas (1990) developed a 1st Person Scientific approach he calls ‘heuristic phenomenology.’ In writing this article, I utilized Moustakas’ heuristics along with Focusing and ‘Thinking at the Edge’ or TAE (Gendlin, 2004a), to define and further elaborate

my theory. The heuristic research method uses *experiencing* as the fundamental basis of research that desires to say something meaningful from that experiencing. Moustakas specifically employs Focusing in this method to further refine the concepts, aid in analysis, and give pause during the research process as it is unfolding. Of the role of Focusing in heuristic research, Douglas and Moustakas (1985) say, “the focusing (sic) process enables the researcher to identify qualities of an experience that have remained out of conscious reach primarily because the individual has not paused long enough to examine his or her experience of the phenomenon” (p. 25).

Qualitative research approaches like Moustakas’ heuristic method have high internal validity as well as a measure of external validity. Validity in qualitative research is about whether the project as a whole and in its specifics actually captures the experience under investigation. Validity is not best expressed as a measurement — as is the case in traditional scientific approaches — i.e. through establishing correlations or through statistical computation. Rather, validity (internal and external) in qualitative research is an issue of meaning.

The researcher is responsible for conducting the project, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings in a manner that is both rigorous and accurate. Validity is found first internally, as it is felt within the experiencing of the researcher and the subjects, who are referred to as co-researchers. In other words, a finding has validity when it is *felt* to accurately represent the *object of the inquiry*; when the meaning(s) of the experiencing under investigation is presented clearly to the participants and the reader of the report and they resonate to it. Key questions qualitative researchers put to themselves are ‘Do I find myself here?’ and ‘Have my explications of a certain experience/experiencing fairly and descriptively captured the experience or experiencing?’

Second, many qualitative researchers contend that external validity (i.e. generalizability vis-à-vis causal inferences) is an inadequate concept for understanding human experiencing. Some suggest, and I agree, that a new term be used instead: *transferability*. Transferability refers to the ability of our results to be found to be meaningful in like situations. Transferability in qualitative research is found when we personally sense meaning in the data presented. This implies thoroughness and appropriate use of procedures. If, as a reader, you can find yourself there in my report, then you have, in this sense, validated the findings.

One key demonstration of transferability is found in the written report itself. No doubt writing is a powerful tool in this form of research as it needs to carry the felt understandings forward in the writing itself. If the findings resonate for the reader (who is not a co-researcher), internal validity and transferability are achieved. In my view, higher internal validity and transferability come with methods that specifically highlight the implicit felt sense.

Findings in qualitative research are generally presented as themes of specific experiencing under investigation. In this case, I am looking at the nature of human change such that it is possible we retain our sense of ongoingness. Having a method like Moustakas’ is important if we want to say something from experiencing that is not going to be seen as just ‘about me.’ I won’t go more into the specific uses of or background of TAE here. There is

an entire *Folio* edition (2004a) referenced above if the reader would like more on this valuable tool.

I also want to note here that I am drawing upon the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to help me elaborate upon this evolving theory of the nature of exceeding. Levinas' philosophy emphasizes ethics as the fundamental field in which human beings become human. For Levinas, ethics is *the* form of interhuman relating from which all other considerations and abstractions flow.

Levinas says, "I respond before I am" (Silberstein, 1962). I come into being because we are already in relation. Kunz (2008) sums up Levinas' philosophy as pointing to:

The concrete presence of the neighbor commanding, 'do not do violence, help me,' as more fundamental than any thinking about ethical responsibility. The prohibition of harm comes first not from religious or social dictates but from the goodness of the other for the good of the other. His philosophy is as simple as that. The application of this first principle, which is not a principle but persons, commands our renewed attention to many social, psychological, political, legal, economic, educational problems (Kunz, personal communication, 2008).

For Levinas, and Kunz, *persons* are not already separated entities. We come into being as interactions first and are thus the foundation of his philosophy and any principles or actions we might make.

Elsewhere in his ethical philosophy, Levinas distinguishes the *saying* from the *said*. *Saying* is a form of expression that is alive, incomplete, engaging, engaged, and searching. *Saying* holds manifestation by virtue of it retaining the *feel* of our lived situation. Thus, the *saying-form* of any relationship, like that of my grandmother and me, is fresh, ongoing, and felt. The *said-form of relating* is a result of our signification of (or ascribing meaning to) manifestation. The *said-form* is distinguished by its demonstrating overt stabilization, or a deadening of the raw potential found in *saying*. Modern science and psychology, in general, over privilege stabilization. Retaining the fresh openness of the *saying* that moves each process forward is sometimes lost.

For Levinas, and I am certain for Gendlin, it is important to have a *feel* for the aliveness present in our living. Levinas sometimes referred to this *feel* as phenomena. He says, "Phenomena open to disturbance, a disturbance letting itself be brought back to order" (Levinas, 1996, p. 73). I have experienced in my life many instances that are of the *saying kind* that opens further through 'disturbances'. The saying-form of relating still holds within it freshness, discovery, perplexity, even awe. It is form(ed), but it has not been fixed in my consciousness as it might be were I to ascribe it particular, static meaning. In other words, when a feeling pattern is symbolized or assumed to have a fixed meaning, we will inevitably have to come to terms with its rigidity. The result of having to bear this rigidity is often experienced as psychic pain or guilt.

Saying kinds of relating hold exceeding within them. Temporary or possible or incomplete statements about how we relate to things gives us the freedom to go beyond **our historical relationship with them.**

FURTHER INSTANCES OF EXCEEDING

While I am using two central instances from my personal life to build a theory of exceeding, these are by no means the only instances I could have used. I have many, many instances of the nature of exceeding I can point to from my clinical practice, my life as an educator, and other theories already articulated. I take a calculated risk in presenting an emerging theory based upon what might seem merely personal stories. I feel the risk is worth it. Human beings living in their particular lives generate all known theory. Saying how it is a theorist comes to form an idea is uncommon, but I hope it becomes more the case in the future. As I continue further in what amounts to public theory making, I most certainly will feed my theory with the information found in other domains in the manner suggested in the final steps of TAE.

In the first instance, the case of my grandmother and me, I longed for the form of our relating: What's doings? Yes, I grieved over the disturbance of our usual pattern of being with each other, which had been exceeded by another form arising from within the formerly formed relating.

Another instance of a *saying kind of relating* emerged while I was in graduate school in Chicago in the mid-1980's. I had a course that gave me an experience, which led me to regain a sense of that bit of fresh living. The course was Client-Centered Theory and Practice, taught by Margaret Warner. I recall that class with great warmth and fondness. It introduced me to the simple, yet profound experience of being heard. It also introduced me to Focusing. Finding words to say what was as yet unknown or at the edges of my awareness, proved to be a catalyst for deep personal recognition and change.

Through Gendlin's Focusing process and later through *A Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997) and TAE, I began to see just how vital *exceeding* is to understanding who I was as a person. A significant piece of this understanding came by getting in my bones what it is like to be heard and to hear another human being. Experiencing listening and being heard were fundamental. During this time, I came across one of my favorite sayings. It comes from an ancient Taoist, Lao Tse whose words sum up my deep feelings this way:

It is as though he listened,

and such listening as his enfolds us in a silence

in which at last we begin to hear

what we are meant to be.

— Lao Tse, 4th century, BCE

While learning Focusing, how to listen, and experience being heard, I began a deep inward journey. Like so many of us, that first flush of excitement that comes when something really shifts in us, setting us a bit freer inside, was profound. I wanted more and was a bit

intimidated by it as well. Focusing enlivened and scared me. I could sense some possibility of deep, deep recognition coming and it was huge — life altering in fact.

Almost from the start, I felt Focusing was a pattern I could enter into, not a technique or even a skill per se but as a life process. I was taking plenty of technique and skill-oriented classes and this thing called Focusing was definitely not like those. With the dedication of great teachers like Reva Bernstein, Mary McGuire, and Doralee Grindler-Katona, I found myself in similar experience perhaps to that which Lao Tse refers. I was experiencing being heard for the very first time and in that I began to hear what I was meant to be, who I was. Who I am was changing.

These weeks and months of further exposure to Focusing and the tradition of listening from the Client-Centered perspective of Carl Rogers (1902-1987), helped me affirm something I had known for a long, long time and yet could not comfortably say aloud to myself, much less to many others: I am a gay man. While this was a freeing realization, I was enough of a natural skeptic to know that what I needed to find was my own way in this. I could not follow others' way of being — the cultural patterns and personal habits I saw in the gay community of Chicago. Certainly, I could not embrace being gay as another kind of limiting, totalization of identity. Rather, with the help of the Focusing process, my self-identity remained as something fresh and on-going without risking failure of a cohesive sense of self. Identity was not *signification* as Levinas would caution against; i.e. my nature remained fresh, negotiations of choices were entered as fresh processes, ones for which an outcome was never wholly known until it was there.

After I graduated, I came to Seattle University. I read more and more of Gendlin's works, eventually diving into *A Process Model* and TAE. I saw terms that I could feel inside as being 'right' and expressing my own kind of knowing and being. *Everything by everything, occurring into implying, focaling, direct referent, new universals*, these are just some of the terms coming from Gendlin's new philosophy of implicit entry that bring me excitement and even something like hope.

*I had a second birth when my soul and my body
loved one another and were married.*

— Khalil Gibran (1927/1998)

While this sentiment might seem overly romantic, it does capture something of the experiencing into which Focusing can open us. What was forming inside me was a sense of cohesion, of disparate aspects or parts of myself united even as I felt the former formed notions I had of myself exceeding themselves. Significations returned back to phenomena.

*The greatest discovery of my generation is that man can
alter his life simply by altering his attitude of mind.*

— William James (1842-1910)

While Gibran and James could not have anticipated our world 100 years hence, their words still have the power to evoke and open in us new considerations and new actions. Like their words, Gendlin's many essays powerfully remain potent precisely because they retain the fresh openness from which they arose. We find ourselves in them. It is frankly much to my surprise that I find myself in the philosophy of Gendlin, because 'I am no philosopher.' Thanks to Gendlin, we can now precisely say how the use of language gets beyond language and make our own models from our directly felt knowing.

In this regard, I have been working out my own model of how humans exceed, or evolve, change, or progress, and retain our sense of continuity. A person like me whose core identity shifts into a fresh cohesive sense of self can be human in the usual sense. How is this possible? This might sound an odd way to put something, but it's very close to Gendlin's question 'how is Focusing possible?'

In the instance of my 'coming-out,' I have a sense of myself as being the same guy before and after I 'came out.' While recognition of an aspect of my personhood certainly was a 'big deal' for a time, it did not monopolize my sense of being 'me'. In a similar way, my relating to my grandmother changed many times. It seems it would have changed once and for all at her death, but this is not so. I continued my being in relation with her beyond her death, through personal reflection, working out my theory, and writing this paper. The man who Kevin is now is no different from then — and yet is not the same either. The forms are exceeded without loss of cohesion.

SOME THEORY DEVELOPMENT ON THE NATURE OF EXCEEDING

Major elements of this project took shape during and immediately after attending a TAE workshop in upstate New York in the summer of 1998. I developed some sentences that say something of the kind of human it is who can also be found as 'me' (not just a formed me as in an individual) and who is also exceeding that form. I put it this way at the TAE retreat:

It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition. This fresh being I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.

I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.

Each of these sentences can be elaborated and needs to be. Taken together they retain the fresh understanding that comes to me when I dip into 'who is a changing human such that I can be possible.' Let me elaborate a bit about the sentences.

Sentence 1: *It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition.* I have said something already about the first sentence. I'll return to this one and all others at the end of this essay.

Sentence 2: *This fresh being that I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.*

I have two central elaborations on this sentence: 1) Humans are perceivers of patterns — patterns that at first glance seem separate and unconnected — as well as being pattern makers and pattern changers, and 2) bodily order exists AND it is a kind of order that elaborates.

First, let me say more about patterns, pattern making, and pattern changing. Some mystics, yogis, saints, and yes, some scientist types (like psychologists, physicians, and physicists for instance) have perceived patterns beyond those explainable by current scientific means. The evidence for such patterns exists beyond what is directly observable, not in the external or purely intellectual, but the deepest internal places of our experience. From here we can sense and know much more than from our intellect alone.

If you've ever been in love, you know exactly what I mean. Can you really explain your feelings of love for another person? Of course not. But, you don't have to either, because it's one of those things that we all know about. To put this in Process Model vernacular, shared processes (like love) are understood in their crossing (sharing of some type) and dipping (felt sensing/Focusing). Gendlin (1995) says, "We can understand each other, across different experiences and different cultures, because by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before" (p. 559).

For me, patterns can function as crossings do for Gendlin. They are not essentially fixed as permanent pre-existing commonalities or symbolizations, but are re-structured in their use. Of course, patterns of any kind can also function as their own whole. These two forms of patterning do not contradict. In my way of putting this, patterns (making them, recognizing them, and changing them) are forms that are exceeded in everyday use and in larger scale human evolutions; i.e. social change, peace building efforts, etc. They are form(ed) and yet are exceeded in and by their use.

In a paper on Rumi, Elizabeth Lease (1997) stated that Rumi — and I might add this is probably true of other mystics such as Thomas Merton, John of the Cross, or Theresa of Avila — believed that "all corporeal things are manifestations of God, thereby creating an inherent link between the form and the formless." Mystics and scientists agree that we see opposites via our sensory perception, but mystics go one-step further to insist that we see the manifested form of the infinite and unknowable attributes of God in patterns of perception itself. From a mystic's point of view there are two realms of the universe, the form and the formless, which should not be construed as distinct.

Lease says,

They are analogous to the front and back of a mirror with its backside acting as the earth and the front acting as the image of God, a continuum of sorts. Man, bounded by his physical manifestation, illustrated by his utilization of his five senses, sees only the forms of the universe; yet, Rumi always maintains that there persists a component of man which is capable of comprehending and appreciating the non-corporeal: the soul (Elizabeth Lease, 1997, retrieved December 12, 2007. Link inactive).

Dipping and crossing are felt experiences. These terms help us understand how patterns emerge, how they can be freshly entered, and how they are exceeded. In my example of

coming out, and in the account of my grandmother's descent into senility, I certainly felt the exceeding of the prior forms of relating. At times the ordering of the patterns of my identity or the character of my relating gave up its sentience with a bang. At times in both processes, I recall vividly a sense of being cracked open. This probably sounds frightening, even violent. I won't disagree.

I experienced a profound sense of lightness and opening as these orders (patterning) cracked in a way I felt precisely. We see this dual phenomenon of shifts and releasing frequently in Focusing and TAE. The shift in felt sense from 'all stopped up' to relief, for instance, is well documented in our work. The 'ah ha,' or sudden insight, comes sometimes and sometimes not. And still we can say 'something has shifted.' The cracking of orders is an aspect of the nature of exceeding. It does not require an 'ah ha' or even dramatic feeling to be felt and recognized as its own sub-process.

Second, we can say that bodily order exists AND that it is a kind of order that elaborates. We see this so clearly in watching an infant grow to childhood and then adulthood. The 'order' is there, in the DNA and environment, but humans are not limited by those orders. Our own order, its bodily complexity, is of the on-going kind of order. Gendlin (2007, June) says this so lucidly: "Living is always a fresh, further forming (all the way from the cells up)."

I've found Gendlin's article, *The Responsive Order* (1997) particularly valuable in helping me find my words and terms around this emerging concept of an endlessly elaborating bodily order that is freshly moving forward and retains the already formed form (of cells, organismic processes, of identity, etc.) though differently. In this seminal article, Gendlin argues that top-down derivations of findings (from pre-existing concepts, language, symbols, etc. found in either common use or specialized use families) are obviated by the two-way feedback of the experiential response (what we know as felt sensing). Gendlin insists we lose nothing of the logical order when we dip into our felt sense. In other words, we don't 'lose our minds' when we tap into the felt sense. No matter the activity, the felt sense functions responsively, not chaotically.

I am using this article in two ways. First, it serves as a precise description of how forms are exceeded. Second, it shows how our fresh concepts can retain bodily aliveness and still be empirical. Gendlin gives us some twenty detailed characteristics of his 'responsive order.' He uses and defines 'order' in a way that is useful to this project, and of course to many other applications as well. He says, "Whatever we study is very orderly indeed, but this cannot be the kind of order that conceptual systems have, since it can respond precisely to mutually exclusive systems" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 3). The responsive order and whole freshly derived systems like this theory, cannot be mutually exclusive, as they are responsive to each other and thus malleable to a certain extent vis-à-vis interactions.

Thus, in this way bodily order is precisely known, not mutually exclusive of other orders/orderings, and responsive in character. This point clicked and went very deeply inside me during a TAE phone session with Nada Lou in September 2007. I am including the raw notes as Nada transcribed them from this very brief phone session. It shows the subtle and yet emergent nature of working out an issue using TAE, but more so for us, it shows an elaboration of an instance of what the concept is all about.

‘Being’ in RESPONSIVE order.

There is an order ...

I am **participating** in the responsive order — there is no loss of **ME** as I am participating.

There is a ME there too.

I am participating with eyes looking out.

You are part of a responsive order therefore you participate and there is no loss of ME.

I am a responsive order.

This bit of work from TAE turned out to be a significant piece for me. I recall even now the joy of sensing inside these sentences. Yes, I can still say, I am a responsive order. Gendlin’s article not only helped me fashion something of this theory, but also shows us a way to think from experiencing that does not succumb to relativism or simple confusion. We know now through advances in physics, cellular and molecular biology for instance, that the most basic aspects of our physicality are changing all the time. DNA, once thought to be a blueprint, a static unit partially turned on at best, is now seen as a constantly self-ordering process. As quoted earlier, “Living is always a fresh, further forming (all the way from the cells up)” Gendlin (2007, June).

Nonetheless, *bodily order* is difficult to talk about in most western developed countries, especially with any experiential honesty. Speaking as one of the westerners, I can admit to this difficulty first hand. In my working with dying patients in hospice, schizophrenics, those claiming to be alien abductees, mystics and such, I have been pushed to see and eventually welcome the diverse complexity in human psychological experience. But, it hadn’t been until I started on this project, that I began to appreciate that what I was noticing had not been said before in this exact way: bodily orders exceed and retain. *Body* and *order* are now terms used in a specialized manner.

I could not find a place in psychology, sociology, physics, or religion for what was striving to be elaborated inside me. Somehow, I could not read the past into what I was doing. In a very practical way, the ‘doings’ going on inside me, especially the uncategorizable, wouldn’t let me put this into a form that already was. What is emerging in my work, and in those fields interested in understanding how we *are* already — while still retaining continuity in change — is a new, further development.

Sentence Three: *I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.*

Perhaps its now possible to see how being human today encompasses many potential identities, each being of non-exclusive forms, systems, or patterns. ‘Gay’ in this way, is just one specialized kind of elaboration of a responsive bodily order. We have no idea if these systems, orders, or patterns, even exist outside of *this* bodily order. In fact, it seems clear to me that they do not. They couldn’t. Without a felt body, the self and other elaborations of our particular contemporary complexity could not exist. Yes, we could argue that the ‘body’ is present in some other form that is not purely physical. No matter where you venture in A

Process Model or elsewhere in Gendlin's writings, one thing comes across very clearly to me: the living body is fundamental. We might invent new ways of articulating what body is or means, but at least as I read Gendlin, it will always be, for his purposes and mine here, that kind of body that is physically known.

If we take the crux of each of my sentences, we have the beginnings of a theoretical engine. The sentences as I've written them contain crux words that I've underlined in the sentences below.

Sentence 1: It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition.

Sentence 2: This fresh being I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.

Sentence 3: I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.

When I pull out these crux words and phrases and change them a bit more, I get this statement: **It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly.**

APPLICATIONS

If we can accept that human beings do indeed change, sometimes in easy moves and at other times in sudden, almost cataclysmic ways, we can think further about the precise nature of this change in many specified domains related to human living. As Gendlin has already shown through Focusing, change can be helped along. Focusing helps us establish with others and ourselves a trusting environment where acceptance is its fundamental attitude. In this environment, change can come smoothly and with flair. However, what of other less private domains in which a living notion of change is key?

There are at least five human domains that can benefit from further articulation of precisely how change works within them: personal growth, social change, spirituality, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. In brief, these areas of human living have many concepts applied to them, in some cases with less than desirable results. If we think for a moment about our nature as *fresh beings that continuously exceed and endlessly elaborate the universe*, we might then find and ask critical questions within any of these domains. We will be able to formulate precise and pertinent questions that come from within the domain and thus are useful to it. At this point, I have made only a small beginning toward formulating critical questions for these arenas of human living. I feel more will come.

CONCLUSIONS

I know this article might sound very, very heady or esoteric or overly optimistic. Really though, I'm trying to say something that I believe we all already 'get' intuitively. We change and yet we do not lose ourselves along the way. I've attempted to start a bit of theory making to address how this could be so. I've followed Gendlin's lead in some ways and ventured into my own territories in others.

We all know too well that we're not just passively connected — as if we have no influence on events and circumstances. We are actively engaging our world at many, many levels all the time, and exceeding the various and many forms we create and encounter. It's just that we don't generally notice the connections, and the ways we influence and are influenced. As Gendlin suggests in *Focusing*, our lives are connected to other lives close by, to other people in other places on our planet, and, in fact, to the whole planet and universe.

I've come to this sense of the way things are from observing myself, my friends, and many people who suffer, in one way or another. Some suffer from defeat or the shackles of their personal history. Some who suffer do so silently and without notice. I owe a great deal of this bit of theory-making to the work I and others do with persons such as these. I'm more convinced than ever that we are more than our problems, more than what even our biology or history or circumstances have delivered to us. Persons who have suffered in life, as well as people who haven't, have shown me that it is fundamental to being human to find ways forward in life. Even if the way forward is not clearly seen, we always retain the potential to become more than our given nature or circumstances seem to dictate. We are people built up from low origins to exceed even the most intractable of conditions.

I am very interested in exploring further the *nature of exceeding* as it points me back again and again into my sense that, "We are an on-going articulation of the universe, curious and joyful. We need only to remember to begin, from there our unique pathless path unfolds us like a starry night," (From <http://www.focusingnorthwest.com/resources.html>).

My statement: **It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly**, is alive for me and I hope for you as well. If I've made my case successfully, you can find yourself in it. Some bit of further living in you might be sparked to do your own elaborating, or to rest in the sense here that you already are an elaboration and nothing more need be done. In any case, no matter what more 'doings' go on from here, this is a start on a theory.

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THE BODY, WHICH LOVES WHAT IT LOVES

Why the Philosophy of the Implicit Matters

Kye Nelson

*You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves*

— Mary Oliver¹

There is a portal where the infinite-at-play enters the world, like water welling up from a spring. It is a soft, shy place. It is where your heart can be touched.

Such a touch is a quiet call, and comes in your body. Slow just a bit, and you can heed it. Heeding it is the soft shy animal of your body, loving what it loves. You are *moved*.

Sometimes being moved is a movement of the heart only. Other times, being moved draws you forward into physical movement that wells up from the deep source.

You are near this portal where the heart is touched when you hear the shy quickening of a voice at certain words. You can recognize it in a certain soft luminousness that appears sometimes in someone's face. You also can find it from inside if you look back on things you have done which glow with meaning, or when you notice what is touching your heart in this moment.

What is welling up and flowing through this shy 'I' often appears to be very small. It might show up in some particular something *you* do when you're gardening. It might show up in precisely the way *you* mother your children. It doesn't have to look earth shaking.

The shy 'I' whose heart is touched is just the actual human being you are, going about and doing whatever *you* do in your loving, *for* what you love, with whatever is available here and now. It is the shy 'I' of you in your humanity, where you *can* be touched. It is the 'I' the deep source *needs* if it is to flow through you.

The heart's movement *makes* an offering. For something to be made is for it to take a tangible form.² When something is formed by the heart's movement, what is made is infused with the loving welling-up in its making.³

A SUITABLE GIFT

In his book *A Timeless Way of Building* (1979), the architect Christopher Alexander introduced the idea of a 'quality without a name'. He said this quality—which is *felt*—is something present in all great buildings. A building with this quality seems more 'alive'.

In his most recent work, Alexander (2004) presents a set of concepts with which one can think about what is happening when one experiences a structure as being more ‘alive’. He also speaks of the state of being he inhabits, himself, when he is making something:

Sometimes, when I make something, my mind is so concentrated on it that it becomes different. It becomes a pure thing. I am not concerned with showing off, but only with making the thing itself. How can I set my mind in this egoless direction? At every step in the 10,000 steps during the making of a building, I am always, at each step, asking which of the things that I can do next is the one which will be the best gift to God...

I try to sense it. I allow my dim feeling of this ground, to unfold in my mind’s eye. I try to imagine what I would be looking at if I were looking into heaven, and then ask myself what that thing would be in this particular case (pp. 310–312).

Each time, he uses it to do something different. And yet, each time he’s using the same concept.

This concept is a special *kind* of concept, a kind I’d like to call a *magical concept* because something ‘magical’ happens when it is used.

I do something akin to what he describes—especially when I’m drawing or painting. Often I call it ‘being mole-ish’, because I feel my way very directly step by step as a mole does. I’m not looking ahead but am *immersed* in the feel of that heartfelt thing as if it were the earth around me. I’m digging forward through that and letting my ‘nose’ and the feel of the ground show me each next move.

In mole-ishness, the movements are small enough to love just exactly what they love. The mole is small and soft and blind, and is guided only by the feel and smell of the earth as its body is molded by it, in this exact moment of its movement forward. Mole-ishness is how it feels to be staying so close to your loving in each exact moment that a series of ‘sparks’ full of glowing meaning are being generated by your movements.⁴

Here’s an example of mole-ishness: Often I’ll see something that catches my eye—maybe the light playing a certain way on the wall—and something in me says, “Oh, that’s beautiful!” I’m moved by what is beautiful, and in being moved I respond to that beauty as precisely as I can.

But generally it is not so easy to grasp exactly *what* it is that’s so beautiful. So as I’m moved, I try some things. I approach what is so beautiful by making different lines on the paper. I continue to be moved to try different things until I touch ‘it’. Sometimes ‘it’ is an actual line; other times ‘it’ is in the way the lines of my different approaches work together.

Sometimes, instead of the approach to ‘it’ being in lines on the page, it comes just in looking. I look and look, and then at a certain point I say, “Oh! *That’s* what it is! *That’s* what it is doing there!” It *makes sense*. And what is it that makes sense? Well, something like the actual shape of the dot so that it glints! At these times, it is in the attempt to understand, that I’m offering my heart. When I do understand, the offering has been fully made.

When I sit down to draw, there's something I must do first before I can approach what is so beautiful. I have to remember to slow down. If I don't slow down, I get a lot of stuff on the paper that isn't right, and it is all dead.⁵

It is a slowing down somewhat like the Focusing slowing down.⁶ But it is also somewhat different. A thick, thick quiet settles on me, around my head and arms and upper back. My heart gets quieter. My muscles are more relaxed. I feel my breathing slowing down. My breaths get further apart. There's a bigger *space* between each breath and the next. Sure there's more time between breaths, but it is a *space*. Even though the breathing itself is quiet, the real quiet is *between* the breaths.

It is a hush. It gets quiet like the snow quiet, between breaths. It is delicious there, and it is a relief. It is like the period at the end of the sentence. It is a rest. It is like the big space between each word and the next when I used to read the same books over and over to my small son. With a little one around, there was no time to think my own thoughts. In those days, between the words of a book I'd read a hundred times, I found a space where I had *me* again.

When I slow down, what it is that I am seeing begins to emerge. Little by little, as I approach it, I begin to understand what is so beautiful here.

For me, drawing is offering. The feeling of 'oh, it's beautiful!' *has* to be expressed. The feeling from inside is that I can't keep it to myself. It is almost like a pressure, where it has to be offered...that's where it is a welling up. That's why I have to understand it, so that I can offer it.

The 'offering' I mean here is what loving makes. What loving *makes* is infused with that loving. I think this is at least one dimension of Alexander's 'quality without a name'.

Alexander considers modern architecture to have little of that 'quality without a name' in it—what we might call 'aliveness' or 'loving' or 'care'—and he wants to change that. He sees the root of that problem as lying in what is considered possible to think about. Accordingly, he is attempting to widen the scope of what one can think about.

Alexander's first training was as a mathematician. He is painfully aware of the disreputability of claiming that states of being of the kind discussed here are real. This makes it difficult for architects (and others) to do work which has the 'quality without a name'.

A NEW STANDING⁷

Our present official world-view is astonishingly powerful. We have gained irreplaceable things from it. Because it gives us such power, the contemporary scientific model itself has great power over us.

Ironically, science itself has known that the model was inadequate, and many scientists have sought to improve it. But the attempts to do so *have been framed in terms of the old model*. There has been no other way to proceed, because there *was* no other model

basic enough to *include* the mechanical model and still also include human experience from inside.

We need a new model. A Process Model (Gendlin, 1997) lets us think further about what is deeper and wider than today's science. The problem that had to be solved was not a scientific one, but a philosophical one. The mechanistic model is a philosophical model, not a scientific model. We have to build a new philosophical model that includes everything we've got and also lets us go on. This is what A Process Model (hereafter PM) does. PM *shifts the ground*.

I first attempted to read PM off loose-leaf sheets before we had the bound book, but found it unwieldy. Maybe that's one reason it was such a delight to turn through the pages quickly when I got my bound copy. That particular quick reading was on a plane. I have an image of myself sitting in an aisle seat, PM in hand, turning each page, reading for a minute, then turning to the next. I was flying over the work in my mental airplane, getting a feel for the terrain as a whole.

That reading of PM took just 2 or 3 hours. Watching Gendlin build up his model was a bit like watching 'God' create the world in 7 days. I came away from that reading feeling PM was like Genesis. (I still feel that way.) There is no other book I know that is not just *about* life, but *is* life happening before your eyes, growing up out of itself and creating something new in the world on every page.

On that trip through PM, one delight was the exclamation marks. 'God' would create another little bit of the world and then would get so excited about it!

I was also enchanted by the image of Isadora Duncan in Chapter VIII, the last chapter.

Isadora Duncan stands still, sometimes for a long period. She senses dance steps she could move into, but they don't feel right. What would feel right is not sure yet. She is seeking... looking for, waiting for the right feel to come, willing to let it come... It is a way of relating to, interacting with... what? Where? (Gendlin, 1997, p. 216).

Isadora herself says of her standing, "I was seeking and I finally discovered the central spring of all movements" (Duncan, 1927, p. 75).

But what *is* this 'central spring'? Gendlin continues,

It is an interaction with a right feel, a new kind of feel which will come in a new place... Her new looking, waiting for, letting... These change what comes, but it is still not right. She responds to its changed way of feeling by being differently toward it in some way... [And] the feel itself becomes more distinct, like something there, a datum, an object, something in a space that wasn't there before? (Gendlin, 1997, p. 216).

PM gives us a way to think about what I called ‘the deep source’ earlier in this paper, and the not-yet-fully-here that wells up from it, into the world. It connects *directly* with the not-yet-fully-here in sentence after sentence.

THE PROCESS OF A PROCESS MODEL

I became fascinated with tracking the ‘process’ of A Process Model. I wanted to understand how it could be that it *was* what it was talking about. The whole work is like a stepped pyramid in which each layer builds on the previous ones. *How* did it build those layers on the previous ones? I started to highlight the points where Gendlin talked about what he was doing.

I was especially drawn to the process of ‘deriving’.⁸ Deriving was the heart of the book for me because that was where the genesis actually happened. I marked every spot where Gendlin used the word ‘derive’ (and there are a *lot* of them in the book) to try to understand exactly what *he* meant by deriving. Around this time is when I also started to work closely with Gendlin on Thinking At the Edge (TAE), so there was naturally a cross-fertilization of understanding from there back into PM, and vice versa.

Gendlin’s deriving is an extension of how deriving happened in logic before him in philosophy, but his deriving uses logic in a new way. I want to show a bit of how he does it, before I go on to talk about *what* he derives which shifts the ground.

In TAE, something like deriving happens at step 12, in going back and forth with step 11. To derive as Gendlin does, you have to start with something you know from your own living, and then a fresh way of saying the odd pattern you’ve found in actual incidents.

Step 11 is where you dive down into the deep underneath of what you’re working on, repeatedly finding how one main term in its very nature already includes what one of the others means. You look for where they are *already* connected *through* what you know from your experiencing.

At step 12 you formally define each of those terms by using the others. You ‘close’ your terms and you let them work alone just with rigid logic. Working with them like this yields unexpected results—some exciting and good, while others are somehow wrong. Also you may notice that something important seems to be missing. Worst is seeing where in spite of your best intentions, you’ve fallen right back into the trap of saying what you know in terms of the ‘old’ Cartesian model!

So back you go to step 11, and after that you make another run at 12 and it *still* doesn’t work. That sends you back to 11 again. It is a back-and-forth because it takes a lot of digging at the spot you marked in the beginning, to find just how that pattern works. This digging-it-out is the process of *explication*. It may sound awful—and you’d be right, it *is* awful, because it is growing *you* into a very new way of thinking. The creaky old familiar way complains about this! It can be exhausting! But the new way of thinking is like getting to the top of a very tall hill you never climbed before, where the wind is fresh and you stand and look out over so much more than you ever saw. And on the way up you do get glimpses. It is awful, *and* it is wonderful.

When you have a structure in which each term you have used is defined by the others, and the pattern of what you cared about in the first place has been explicated by that mesh of terms, then you have created the nucleus of a theory. These terms in their relations to one another have built a little world in which what you cared about exists *in words*, in the world. You have derived it.

WHAT THE METHOD LOOKS LIKE

I want to pause from this more abstract discussion of the philosophy and its method, to show the method actually in play. I'll begin by finding a few terms I have used in this paper that arrest me as I read them now. Because these terms came from explicating one specific kind of experiencing from inside it, I can play further with them in a TAE process:

the shy 'I'
a series of sparks full of glowing meaning
coming into being
arrested where your heart is touched
a movement which moves you

Looking at these, I'm aware that even though I want to keep it, 'coming into being' has problems. It already means things publicly which I *don't* mean. The public meanings mean less and 'other' than what I mean.

I begin to look at what the phrase already means which crowds out my meaning. (This is TAE step 3.) In the 'public language' what does 'coming into being' mean? What does 'being' mean?

Being is existing. I think of 'just existing', not really *living*. That's definitely not what I mean. In Wikipedia I read this: "we only define an object's existence by its relation to other objects, and actions it undertakes."⁹ I don't merely exist as 'an object' in relation to other objects, and defined by the actions I undertake!

So what *did* I want 'coming into being' to mean? (This is a TAE step 4 question.)

To get back what I meant, I need a sentence that has my felt sense of 'coming into being' *in it*. Here is how I used it: "*In that back-and-forth conversation, something shining but not yet fully here, is coming into being...*"¹⁰

In that back-and-forth conversation, something shining but not yet fully here, is ...
...it's speaking in the conversation
...it's utterly in the conversation
...oh! It's a new utter-ance!¹¹

I sit with the term 'a new utter-ance'. I notice it works in one way but not in another. But what 'utter-ance' loses for me I can get back if I also say 'the whole conversation that's going on that it was *already in* before it 'got here'".

Each of these phrases says a part of what I mean by ‘coming into being’. Now, with all my loving for that one I say to each, “What did you *want* to mean?” (This playful loving for the phrases is part of the quality of TAE step 5.)

Coming into being: emanating out with sparkly trails like a firework going off!

A new utter-ance: all here all the way, in how it newly belongs here

Already in before it ‘got here’: just what the soup needed [i.e., I can already ‘taste’ just what it is that the soup is lacking, when I’m cooking or eating it. That’s why I pick up the salt.]

Now I let these new terms play together with the terms from the beginning of this exercise:

What is coming into being are sparks. Sparks are the utter-ances that were already in the conversation before they came, and are just what the ‘soup’ needs. The ‘soup’ doesn’t need anything that exists in it already. It needs exactly what is not yet here, but which is ‘already in it’ where it is needed.

The need is already here. Sparks are what is missing. What is missing is exactly what is ‘already in it’ where it is needed.

‘Sparks’ are alive with the ‘quality without a name’ that something has, when loving takes form in utter-ances.

‘Being’ of this kind is not mere existing, but ‘sparks’ which are utter-ances. Since we’ve shown that ‘being’ can be of this kind, we have extended the meaning of ‘being’. ‘Being’ now means at least this.

As I return to discussing the philosophy of the implicit, I suggest you bring back from reading this exercise the feeling of ‘what is missing’ which is ‘already in it’ where it is needed. If you’ve got that feeling with you, how ‘objects’ are derived below may make more sense.

HOW THE GROUND SHIFTS

Gendlin has solved the problem of how to get beyond the representational assumption in the Cartesian model, in which objects are seen as already ‘out there’, separate from ‘me’, and requiring me to make a map ‘in here’ in the mind which ‘copies’ nature more or less accurately.

The ground shifts in how an ‘object’ is *derived* in PM. We shift from *representation* to *explication*.¹² A *process* model is an *explication* model. We explicate a ‘bit’ of the life process from inside the process itself. Objects seen from *inside* life process are not representations. Objects are *being generated by* process. They are generated *in the interaction* between implying and occurring. They are never ‘first’ separate and only interacting after they separately first ‘are’.

To derive objects in such a way that life process as we know it ‘from inside’ makes sense, we need to begin *before* objects, with a consideration of body and environment, and of sequences in life process.

PM begins by laying out 4 kinds of environment (en). For our purposes here, we only need to consider two of these:

- en#1: the environment as seen by a spectator who is separate from the environment, and who separates different ‘things’ which are ‘in’ the environment from one another.
- en#2: the environment as it participates within the life process before any separation between body and environment. This puts *interaction first*.

En#1 is all that the Cartesian model ‘knows about’. This is because the Cartesian model only sees objects already formed by the spectator, totally separate from ‘me’.

Seeing objects in this way is a powerful move. We also use it ourselves in TAE, in step 12. By means of logical inferences made about observed objects, technology is able to help us do more and more ‘out there’. But it *can’t* let us see the implicit life process and how the environment participates in it. That’s why we have to go back to step 11.

In the old ‘representation’ model, it seemed as though all we have is maps in our minds. The new model—‘explication’—is both the process and the resulting objects.

PM starts with the ‘interaction first’ of en#2. Gendlin says that living process is always both its own implying and an environmental occurring. There is always a sequence in which occurring carries the implying forward. Occurring changes implying into a further next implying.

The ‘interaction first’ of en#2—together with the concepts of *implying*, *occurring*, and the *carrying forward* of a *life process*—form the base level of the ‘stepped pyramid’ of PM’s chapters. In chapter III of PM, a new way of conceiving of objects is derived from these terms. The next several paragraphs show briefly how this was done:

Much of en#2 is constant, air or water perhaps in some cases. Then these are not separate aspects (unless we separate them). But these and other aspects of en #2 may sometimes be missing (p. 12).

If *all* of the life process stops because something in the environment is missing, the creature dies. But sometimes only some of it stops and some of it can continue. Where it is stopped, something could be said to be *missing*. Without that missing part of its environment, *all* the creature’s life process can’t continue.

If the creature does not instantly die because some process is stopped, then we have an implying that was not changed [not carried forward] by an occurring. For example, the animal remains “hungry”... (p. 12).

Perhaps there is soon some new kind of food... But if not, then the implying of feeding will remain the same no matter what other events do occur [until that part of the environment returns] (p. 12).

When that part of the environment occurs again, the stopped part of the life process will continue. Now it looks like the creature recognizes that “object.”

We don't think of the environment as already consisting of objects, and especially not of spectator-defined objects. Rather, something is an object only if it is part of body-en #2, and also sometimes missing... (p. 13).

Noticing that ‘from inside’ life process, objects are only objects when absent makes it possible to derive a new kind of ‘object’: the kind that is involved in behavior and perception. Now behavior and perception can be understood in a new way. Later the cognitive kind of object is derived, and still later the felt sense, the kind of object Isadora looks for.

PM *includes* the Cartesian system, but it begins from a deeper ground and also goes on further. We can keep Descartes’ gift and also rigorously regain what the self, specifically, sees or doesn’t see. We can build new understandings in the very space of public discourse.

PM offers an alternative model. It derives the kind of objects we need for technology, and also lets us think beyond them.

LOGIC AND EXTENSION

The Cartesian world-view is rooted in *logic*.¹³ If we approach logic from the shifted ground, we can keep its strength with us.

Logic is currently seen as a ‘closed’ process, as if all one does is to rather mechanically lay out what follows from already known premises. Logic seems as if it must take place in an arid desert of empty space where nothing new could possibly grow. But in fact logic can work at that very spot in which everything new comes to be.¹⁴

For example, we can see this taking place in the arena of logic and the law:

“In the court room, the Judge reasons and extends the law...in new situations, proceeding via analogical reasoning and logical extension into new and as yet unlegislated territory” (Smith, 1998).¹⁵

Consider the nature of a law. It is a form abstracted from a set of situations. It is a *pattern* lifted out from how we have imagined ourselves acting, in a range of situations *of a particular kind* that may (or may not) have come up in the past.

A form is a generality that doesn’t actually exist in the world ‘all by itself’—it can only be rolled up to a situation and *applied* there. But the situation always ‘talks back’ to

the form; the situation is more precise than the form and the law doesn't quite fit the situation. But the judge must apply the law. So, the *meaning* of that law is *extended*. The form is now bigger than it was, and contains more possibilities for future judges to use in later deliberations.

But the judge's application of the law is not arbitrary. It must *follow* from the law, if the judge is acting with integrity. In a sense the judge is totally bound here; but in another sense, *s/he* is not. The judge's humanity can well up here, in *how* the decision follows from the law in the situations to which the law is being applied.

When it is applied well, the way it is applied feels *right*. We feel a sense of relief at *understanding* the law better, if this was an issue that we were concerned about.

But before the decision, what the judge just showed us wasn't 'there' to see. Nor was it there for the judge, before *s/he* heeded the call to find a way to make the decision that would follow from the law *and* would also make the law more 'right' for this and other situations.

STAYING CLOSE TO THE CENTRAL THING

One of my clients who is the head of a school recently brought up a concern about his staff. He said there was no lightness and grace in two recent staff meetings. This was not typical.

Part of the current problem lay with the goals the board had recently written for the school. They were goals he believed in. But as he began to delegate to staff, it was becoming clear that those goals were going to be hard to accomplish with the available people.

He's a deeply religious man. So in the context of our conversation it was natural to say, "A few days ago I read something that might give you an image to conjure with. Thinking about these goals as a whole, if you were to give God the pencil, what would He be writing here?"

There was a wonderful long, thick pause. Then he told me, "Well...*God* would say that when the staff is overloaded, then they can't support the faculty. And when the faculty isn't supported, they can't draw out the best from the children."

He had just said what the school was all about: drawing out the best from the children. This is a kind of loving. The image of God with His pencil helped him understand the central thing — the school's *kind* of loving.

His voice became quieter, deeper, and more vibrant. He began to apply the concept of 'drawing out the best from the children' to the list. Working toward some of the goals would move them further away from that, instead of being a movement which could *move* him and the school.

Now that he has articulated it, 'drawing out the best from the children' can continue to function as a magical concept for him in other situations.

MAKING A MAGICAL CONCEPT

Before I close, I'd like to offer a way to make a magical concept.

First, remember a particular time when you were able to do something you cared a lot about. Take a minute or two to savor that time...Notice what made it shine for you...With or without words, feel the *you* who did that...the one who *does* that...What *was* it anyway, that *you* were doing then...? What *is* that, which you do?

I'd also like to offer a way to see where you may already be moved *in your thinking*:

A good place to begin is where your loving is. There [may be] something which draws you to deepen your understanding of it, again and again. Where is there something like that which would be satisfying to play with [in your thinking], just for the joy of following that deepening understanding at its edge...?

When the spot is right, you can feel, "to me, this matters." And, you can feel that your experience "speaks" right here. Your whole being gets a little more open and spacious...It makes your heart smile...Here you are on home ground (Nelson, 2004).¹⁶

What might that spot be, for you?

If you played with the instructions above and you have found a spot where it matters to *you* to think further, you may notice that you are touching something very tangible and compelling. This is where something not-yet-fully-here is moving you, in your *thinking itself*. Finding such a spot, you have already begun to think from your experiencing. You are at a place where you can not fully think yet and where new concepts can come to be. If you would like to continue to think from this spot, TAE can take you further on from here.

Developing concepts with TAE allows one stay close to experiencing at each step of thought. It is a back-and-forth movement between logic and experiencing. Though it is not written into the TAE steps to do so, you can also make the further move of staying close to what your loving would like to offer as well, at every 'zigzag' back to experiencing. In this way, your thinking can generate a series of 'sparks'. Loving and thinking are no longer separate. If you also work to make your concepts as extensible as you can (step 13 can help here if you are deliberately use it for this) the loving being offered by means of your concepts could potentially touch more situations, and more kinds of situations.

ENDNOTES

1. Oliver, 1992-c2005, p. 110, "Wild Geese".
2. My use of 'tangible' here emphasizes something that can be *touched*. Though the feeling of touching something might be assumed to be a physical sensation related to one of 'the 5 senses', there are more ways of sensing than just these. A felt sense, for instance, is clearly tangible.

A concept could also be considered to be tangible, in that it is ‘touched’ by the mind contemplating it for a time. A concept is something that takes form, and just as with other forms, it can be infused with the loving which made it. But of course this can be so only if it was actually made by the movement of loving. Not all made things are made with love.

3. There is little room at present in the world of paid work for the ‘soft animal’, much less for what it loves. As a result, there is less and less of that quality which things made with love have, in the world created *through* paid work.

Part of the problem is in *how* we go about valuing what work creates. This is partly procedural (we base our valuations on ‘metrics’ instead of basing them on experiencing, or metrics informed by experiencing) and partly cultural (in our culture we tend to devalue ‘caretaking’ and other work of the heart, compared to other kinds of work).

Attending to experiencing can seem as though it is mere ‘navel gazing’ from the perspective of the ‘get it done ASAP’ work world. It is not necessarily intuitively obvious that things which are annoying at best and actually counterproductive at worst—such as the current over-reliance on automated telephone systems—come about at least partly because of a lack of capacity to attend to experiencing while at work.

The inability to recognize that allowing enough time to attend to experiencing might have *practical* value is endemic in our culture. Even when enough time to attend to experiencing is recognized as having a valuable contribution to make in work settings, well-developed skills in attending to experiencing are often lacking. Or, even if such skills are developed, an understanding of how to apply the skills within the context of the workday is often lacking.

Consequently, the experience of work is often arid, and also generates an aridity that reaches *beyond* the workday, into the world we have to live in ‘after hours’. No one actually wants this aridity. It is high time that we tease apart the strands of the problem of what is generating this aridity that no one wants, and begin to address it.

The recession, global warming, and so on, loom large in our awareness at this historical moment. But taking up the problem of aridity does not imply ignoring these other problems. Instead, it means approaching them differently. It is clear that in some degree, solutions to the serious problems of our time *require* that we offer our care. Of course care is already being offered widely—but there is a further step we could make. We could *think with* what the heart knows. Only then, would we be thinking with our full power.

4. To create something infused with loving doesn’t happen in an instant—there must be a way to stay close to loving, if it is to continue to be what moves you in each step of your work.
5. Part of the reason that the world of work is so experiencing-impooverished, is that time pressure and urgency don’t leave room to slow down and attend to experiencing. As a culture we are addicted to hurry, and think it necessary. And yet, it is generally more efficient to take a little more time and work under less pressure.

It’s already generally understood that the body-mind is healthier when we work under less pressure. But I’d like to draw attention to a further point: when we have time to attend to experiencing as well as ‘the numbers’ in our work, what we are doing takes account of more factors. We are more exactly responsive to the situation, and we have more clarity.

6. 'Focusing' could be roughly defined as sustained attention to some dimension of experiencing before words about it, such that what is implicit in that bit of experiencing 'opens' fruitfully. You can see www.focusing.org for further explanation, a description of the Focusing process, and applications of it, if the term is unfamiliar to you.
7. In common parlance, standing can mean one's rank, reputation, or position in society or in a field. A person of standing has a high reputation and is held in high esteem. A friendship of long standing is one that has endured. Something with standing is fixed, sometimes indefinitely—as in a standing invitation. When something is standing, it's not been cut down. Something standing is not moving; it's rooted in its position as a tree is rooted.

In law, standing refers to the right to act. It also means an uprightness, a full erectness: it is a position of dignity. Standing can also be an act of respect, as in a standing ovation. Standing can be an acceptance of something that is other than oneself as having intrinsic value, as in the new standing that indigenous peoples are beginning to have in the world.

All this mesh of meaning can apply not only to individuals, but also to experiences and ways of being. And, an experience or way of being can have *phenomenological* standing (anyone who knows how to 'go there' can *find* it in their experience) without also having a *culturally legitimized* place. To say that something is culturally legitimized is to say that it is *sanctioned* within the 'official' *world view* of a people.

8. When you understand something you might say, 'oh yes, I see!' But then it may take you a little while to say what you understand, rather than just repeating what the other person said. But once you can say what you understand, you can very often explain other things that neither of you had been able to explain before. Now you might naturally put an exclamation point at the end of the next sentence you write—or you might wildly gesticulate, if you're talking aloud. This is the experience of deriving, in a nutshell.
9. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Being> accessed Aug 28, 2008.
10. Here is one example of where I slowed to attend to the felt sense in the process of this TAE play—there are many others which may become apparent if you read for them.
11. This is an example of the kind of play that TAE encourages. An 'old' word without any qualifiers or other modification, falls back into the old meanings very easily. When I use the word I just coined, 'utter-ance', I mean something new: both that it is an utterance as in a conversation, and also that it is made 'utterly', i.e., the whole being is expressed in it. My hyphen added to the word utterance signals that there is something new being meant here. Coining a word like I did here is not actually typical of TAE, though. More usually, what one does is to add a modifier to a word which precisifies that word: for instance, 'fresh language' or 'felt sense'.
12. The term 'explication' is widely used to refer to the close reading of a written text, in which one is 'reading between the lines' and making explicit or clear what was only implicit before in the text. It can also mean the process of replacing an inexact concept with a more exact one. The term is also used to refer to a thought process which unfolds any implicit meaning and makes it explicit.

In PM, Gendlin is “explicating the explication process” (p. 7). With the new concepts that are generated by this explication, the whole life process can be thought about as an opening and unfolding, so that what was only implicit before is now explicit. The thought process of explication can be seen as a special case of the life process of explication.

Explication is never representation. An explication has “more or different parts than what occurred when what is now explicated “was” implicit” (p. 154). “An explication is not the same as what was implicit. Implying is never to be equated with some structure” (p. 235).

13. Logic is the process of following a line of thought by means of which one can draw a valid conclusion from specific premises. In logic, one makes use of generalizations: *forms* or patterns, of which some specific content is an *instance*. One makes abstractions and discovers their implications.
14. Once a pattern has been abstracted, one sees implications not only generally, but also in specific situations where the pattern is applicable. By means of the pattern, one sees something more in each such situation than one would see without it.
15. Extension here means to enlarge the scope where a pattern can be applied: to expand its meaning, to make it more comprehensive so that it now ‘covers more ground’ than it did.

For instance, Christopher Alexander is concerned with making *physical* things—buildings, paintings, tiles, carpets, etc. There is a broader scope for his concepts about making, though. Concepts *themselves* might also be made in such a manner that they had the quality without a name. This extension is relevant to all manner of work done in the ‘information age’. The earlier footnote about how I am using the word ‘tangible’ in this paper, is another example of extension.

Extension can be useful in practical daily life as well. For instance, there are certain moves I make again and again in writing. Recently I saw that I could apply one such kind of move much more widely in my life. Now I have access to the particular kind of power that move gives me, in more kinds of situations.

An application of a concept can be so different from how it was used before, that there is a kind of ‘state change’ in the concept itself.

16. This process of finding a spot where you are thinking not only from experiencing, but specifically from something in your experiencing where you care to be thinking, can be thought of as “step 0” of TAE. Once such a spot is found, the quoted article creates a bridge for the reader from that spot into the rest of the TAE process.

I’ve said more elsewhere about staying close to what touches the heart in other dimensions of life besides thinking. Aspects of this are laid out in the ‘heeding’, ‘tending your heart’ and ‘finding your place’ methodologies, the ‘wisdom scale’, and in some of my other writings.

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FOCUSING, EMPOWERMENT AND THE NON-DUAL SELF

Thomas Froitzheim

*Wisdom is knowing: 'I' am nothing.
Love is knowing: Everything is 'I'.
Between the two my life moves.*

— Nisargadatta Maharaj

1. A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

1.1. A grand master with a huge heart

When I met Gene Gendlin in 1986 in Chicago and heard him speak on some Focusing related topic, skillfully handling the questions, objections and comments from the audience, I saw a grand master, full of wisdom and overflowing with knowledge. After a couple of sessions with him, I added to my original assessment 'with a huge heart', as he carefully and lovingly attended to my issues. Besides being great sessions, they were an eye-opener, as they showed me how to embody both wisdom and love — or, in this context, 'discrimination' and 'compassion, unconditional positive regard' — as mutually complementing principles. This inspired me to ideally want to keep the two in a harmonious dynamic equilibrium in my own Focusing sessions.

1.2. Both sides now

However, much in the Focusing literature is about only one of these principles: compassion and about how to embrace all parts of the psyche. However, to me, that is but one half, albeit an obviously important one. This article is about *discrimination*, the other half, not because I do not value the former — on the contrary, I hold compassion and its power in the highest regard. I even wrote an article in *The Folio* ('Focusing Touch', 1992) on augmenting compassion during Focusing. But because the 'other half' has not been fully explicated in the description of Focusing, it feels like a crooked picture that needs straightening out.

Within Focusing, the two 'halves' are inseparably intertwined throughout. The discriminatory faculties of our intellect with its cool logic dominate its first part in Clearing a Space, identifying the witnessing Self, the presence, the unchanging essence of our manifested existence. Later, the emphasis shifts to warm, receptive 'sensing into' and nurturing empathy attending to the ongoing process, which the ever-changing specific forms of our inner and outer world are part of. In the course of the session, we help the focusers expand *both* their ability to (1) differentiate and create psychological space, as well as (2) to come into close contact and communion with the various (especially unclear) aspects of their psyche.

1.3. Empowering the focuser

Thus, I will highlight and expand on what I believe is regrettably undervalued in Focusing: Its explicit and implicit view on — and its exquisite handling of — the *true* Self, especially in Clearing a Space. I see the *true* Self as that which we really are, as different from the false ideas about the Self that the majority of us were brought up with, and that to some degree still have a hold on our lives.

While I have been involved with Focusing for twenty-two years, for even longer I have been on a journey to understand this Self. After a series of ‘enlightenment experiences’, insights into absolute reality, I have taken more than thirty years to flesh out this awakening with intensive Self-exploration and comprehensive study and practice of various non-dual approaches. I regard understanding of the Self and its relationship to the psyche as a considerable contribution to the success of psychotherapies and other psychological self-help techniques. Facilitating the focusers’ understanding of the Self for me is the ultimate empowerment of them, as it encompasses understanding that their contentment, feeling full and complete (happiness, well-being, whatever word describes best the essence of that, which we ultimately want) can be entirely independent from the progress with the focusers’ issues. Paradoxically enough, while this contentment inevitably comes with ‘resting’ our attention on the witness, we will still want to continue to process the psyche’s states and conditionings. One reason being that the psyche has to ‘catch up’ to the ‘goodness’ that is already so; another being, that the ‘two halves’, the recognition of the Self and the processing of the psyche are mutually enhancing.

1.4. A path of logic and evidence

‘There are many paths up the mountain’ and mine is but one of the many. My path takes as criteria for the evaluation of certain prevalent notions about the Self whether they are logically inconsistent within themselves and/or if there is obvious evidence against these notions. It is my intention behind elucidating this particular philosophy of the Self’s nature to solidify Focusing’s theoretical underpinnings which I hope in turn will invite practical refinements of its values, intention and techniques.

1.5. The tendency toward contentment

Typically, Focusers’ intentions seem highly idiosyncratic and can range from precise goals like solving a particular problem to simply following life unfolding organically from the unknowingness of each Felt Sense. The intentions held might be geared toward achieving security or sense pleasures or contributing to a higher cause or something else all together. When we try to name the common denominator underlying any of the countless possibilities, we might arrive at ‘wishless happiness’ or ‘contentment’ or ‘peace’ or a rather unspecific wanting to get to ‘feeling good’, since: “*Your body always tends in the direction of feeling better*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.76). Rogers called it ‘Self actualization tendency’.

I personally like the term ‘contentment’ for ‘feeling good’, yet it is not introduced as a technical term to be narrowly defined, but as a loose, generic stand-in for the overall

direction in which people tend to head, and which you can substitute with whatever term fits better for you.

1.6. The significance of the Self for our intention in Focusing

Hence, assuming that Focusing is a tool we use to achieve ‘contentment’ or ‘feeling good’ in our lives and the lives of others, one obvious question is: ‘What, if anything, does knowledge of the Self have to do with achieving this?’

There is, in fact, a direct correlation between this ‘striving for feeling good’, which is underlying most intentions in life in general — and in Focusing in particular — and knowledge of the Self.

1.6.1. Finding a constant source for contentment

For me, Focusing is an undertaking that has reaching contentment as its intention, regardless of whether it is practiced in a setting with a psychotherapist or guide, with a spiritual or pastoral counselor, or in a peer-to-peer exchange. Any concrete, specific goal ultimately has a wish for achieving contentment or the absence of discontent as its essence. In addition, during spiritual or pastoral counseling, or when dealing with bereavement, questions regarding death, the meaning or nature of life may come up, all of which are answered through knowledge of the Self. Consequently, we have to ask what a source of contentment is and how we can use Focusing to find it, before we proceed.

Also, personally, I want this contentment *in all situations, all the time*: I want it to be constant. I do not just want half a glass of it, let alone some puny sample with long and irregular intervals between unpredictable occasions. I want to know where the source is and to be able to fill my cup until it overflows whenever I see fit. I do not want contentment to be dependent on and controlled by somebody or something outside of my Self; I want to be liberated from any such dependency. None of my clients ever wants their daily dose of adversity — desperation or depression or any other less than pleasant feeling. They, too, would be quite agreeable to living entirely without it.

Hence, assuming that we want a constant source of contentment within our Self, the main question is: *Does the Self provide this source?*

1.6.2. Competing Narratives

The description of Focusing’s first movement might suggest an experiential ‘affirmative’ to this question. In Clearing a Space, you quickly glance over (without ‘getting into’) “*everything that is keeping you from feeling absolutely content right now*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.52). The way I understand this sentence, it subtly points at (and implies) what is to happen in Focusing, namely: First, find our Self, who or what we are in the absence of our ‘issues’ (and experience that we are “*feeling absolutely content*”). Then, in the rest of the session, process whatever right now is keeping us from experiencing this contentment.

Gendlin proposes that we already have what we want in our Self, but we cannot experience it, because something keeps us from it. As opposed to the familiar: We do NOT have what we want yet, and we need to pursue it to get it.

2. EXPLORING THE SELF

2.1. The epistemology of the Self

As a long time enthusiast of Focusing, naturally I am also a fan of ‘directly experiencing’ knowledge and deep meanings as they emerge from the felt senses. I had a hard time conceding that not all of the ‘big things’ important to me could be known from ‘being revealed to me experientially’ (I am not talking about physical things shown on an MRI and such). A little incident a few years ago left a big impact on me and would change that attitude for good.

2.1.1. A sunset goes south

I was watching the sun slowly ‘sink’ into the Pacific Ocean, when, for some reason, I had to think of the fact that, in reality, the sun does not set at all, but the earth rotates away from the relatively stationary sun. In an instant, my perspective on the scene shifted dramatically. What had started as a pleasant, but still ordinary sunset turned into an almost religious revelation. I was left sitting on the warm sand with a sense of wonder and magic, marveling at the perfection of life on this wonderful planet.

What had happened? None of the external elements of the experience had changed. The colors had not become brighter, the air not more fragrant, the temperature not balmier, the birds not singing sweeter and no beach beauty was offering to delight me with refreshments or her company. Nor had I put a particular emphasis on any of my perceptual faculties, by concentrating my attention on the intricate hues of the colors for instance. The change had initiated on an intellectual level and from there reverberated through my body, my emotions and further. My subjective perception had instantaneously been shaped by aligning with a scientific truth presented by my intellect and memory. It did not even matter that I had known this fact since grade school. Embodying this radical shift (to a relatively objective perspective) into my way of perceiving in that very moment resulted in my experience being nothing short of spectacular.

2.1.2. Theory enhances experiential practice

Similarly, this exploration will not offer new experiences at first, but interpret the ones we have in a different manner. What initially might sound a bit dry could eventually — just like in my sunset incident — result in both some good experiences and a radical shift in perspective to change how you conduct your Focusing sessions.

Now, the heliocentric nature of our solar system ultimately is still ‘observable’ through direct means of knowing — maybe not with the naked eye (which creates the illusion of the sun moving and ‘setting’), but with the right instruments. The Self as I see it eludes any such direct observability.

2.1.3 A paradox: I cannot know my Self as an ‘object’ or an experience.

For the exploration of the witnessing Self, our direct means of knowing, our sense organs — for simplicity’s sake, I group our ability to ‘sense’ emotions and subtle energy with them — are not fit for the job, since they are directed ‘outward’, toward the sense objects, and do not provide knowledge about me, the subject. I can only *be* my Self, I cannot have an *experience* of this Self; that is, if I understand the Self as the ‘perceiver/receiver’ of any experience. Hence, my exploration cannot be experientially based.

In other words, whereas the objects of the world (and the mind) as phenomena can be objectified, the noumenon, the Self, cannot be known as an object, as it is the subject, the ‘receiver’ of the objects of knowing, complicating the epistemology of the Self. At the same time, we are certainly most intimately familiar with the Self, as we *are* the Self. So we *do* always already ‘know’ the Self *in general*, albeit almost exclusively only in connection with mental objects also present, absorbing our attention, which makes the ‘recognition’, the ‘*specific* knowledge’ of the Self all but impossible.

2.1.4. Knowing through elimination of options

Consequently Self ‘recognition’ is not a question of adding more knowledge, more mental objects, but of removing these objects as obstacles in the way of the Self’s ‘revelation’. For this task to be accomplished we need to heavily rely on logic and common sense. As we examine intellectually and experientially ‘all that is’, containing both me (the subject) and ‘other’ (the objects), we need to *eliminate* choices from this — already ‘known’ — total experience to concisely extract the Self. We provide this opportunity when fully Clearing a Space, where the attention can remain on the Self alone, or rather ‘resting in itself’, as the Self is pure consciousness, pure attention, ‘prior’ to any mental divisions into ‘subject’ and ‘objects’. As the Self is self-evident (see 2.2.3.) no experience outside itself is needed (or wanted!) for its recognition.

2.2. Elucidating the Self

2.2.1. The Self is void of ‘parts’

In Focusing literature the central assertions on the Self are mainly implicit and explanations on its nature are mentioned mostly as an aside.

In the following brief and somewhat cryptic quotes, Gene Gendlin paints a picture of the Self that is dramatically different from what most of us are accustomed to envisioning. In so doing, he sets Focusing apart from the field of other psychological theories and makes it stand out:

And yet, let us observe carefully: Her ‘self’ is not this ‘part’ nor any other part of content. Rather, she is the one who senses it, can speak for it, understands it, and senses its all goodness. The self is not any specific content (Gendlin, 1996, p.35). And:

On a given day we often begin feeling immersed, AS IF WE WERE this or that problem or concern, but after a while of focusing we find that we are not our problems and experiences, rather we have (or touch or sense, or relate to) them. 'I' is here and our problems are there. We discover that 'I' is not this, and not that; rather 'I' has no content at all (Gendlin, 1999, p.3).

This leaves us with at least two major questions: If the Self is not any specific part or content or problem or experience, what is it? What are the 'parts', 'experiences', etc. in relationship to the Self?

To establish a clearer understanding of the Self, we will have to investigate if the deeper philosophical and logical implications of Gendlin's concept match our experience.

2.2.2. I am not my fleeting experiences, but the ever-remaining witness which is present to them.

Any concrete, specific experience — be it a very brief flash of anger with its accompanying thoughts; memories; a felt sense about a situation; a deeply engrained, frequently recurring habit; or a prolonged state of mind such as 'being in love' — is always an event occurring in time.

Let's say, I 'fell in love' and this state lasted about three years, during which I thought I had finally found the happy Self that I really was. Then this state of 'being in love' ended. If my Self really would be this specific state of mind, I would have to conclude that before this state occurred, I, the Self, was not there and after it ended, I was also not there. This is obviously not my experience. My experience is that I am the one who witnessed the whole thing from start to finish and even though I might have various thoughts and feelings about it ending, I exist without this experience.

The same can be applied to *any* experience, as all experiences are time bound: they appear, last a second or a few decades and then disappear. If I were my experiences, I would be gone when they are. However, I remain, present to their coming and going. *I am that without which I cannot exist.*

2.2.3. I am timeless, limitless existence/consciousness

The terms 'Self' and 'I' point to the same, the witnessing conscious, sentient being that I am. That the Self exists and is also conscious is self-evident or self-revealing, meaning that no evidence outside the Self is needed to know its existence. Self reveals itself without any help from anything else, and everything else is evident to the Self.

'I am' already means 'I exist and I am conscious'. If I did not exist, then there would be no 'I' to which to attribute consciousness, and if I existed, but was not conscious, I would have no knowledge about my existence. Hence, there would be no 'me' to assert 'I am'. Thus, the Self is always both existent and conscious.

One could object that in deep sleep the Self is not conscious. However, *it is* conscious, albeit not of any mental objects, as the mind is in (almost) unmanifest condition. It is only conscious of itself, the subject, so no subject/object relationship occurs.

The Self is also timeless. Another name for ‘timeless’ is ‘changeless’. The measurement of time in its simplest form originated in the change of the sun’s position, both during the course of a day as well as a year. Something not affected through time is changeless. When nothing changes, time stops. While the objects are forever changing, the Self, the subject remains invariable, unaffected, timeless.

I am the timeless present or presence in which the concept of a seeming past and future appears. Everything I witness (including my sorrow and joy about memories of the past and hopes and fears about imaginations of the future), I witness in the present, as no other time than that exists other than in my thoughts. I do not need to bring my Self into presence, as I already *am* presence. Aligning the contents of the psyche, the focus of attention with present time I certainly love practicing in Focusing as well as with selected meditation techniques.

The Self is also limitless, has no boundaries, known as ‘one-without-a-second’, in some Eastern philosophies, or non-dual (simplified: the essential unity between observer and observed) here. It is individual, cannot be divided (into parts). While the primary means of knowing, our sense organs, certainly have a limited range with regard to sense objects, the witnessing consciousness is not limited. Whatever is put within range of the associated sense organs is registered in consciousness. There is a distance between, say, the tree I am looking at and my body, but no distance between this tree and the Self. The same is true for a pleasant memory. Both are objects that appear *in* consciousness, with no space or border whatsoever between them and the witnessing Self.

3. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEMS

3.1. ‘False’ self is the cause of psychological problems.

If the true Self really is the source for contentment, then perhaps we confuse something else for our Self, which might account for the times we are discontented. When we explore and solve a problem in Focusing, we indeed find that, in most cases, it originates in two levels of errors: (1) *We accept only part of the psyche as Self.* And (2) *We accept only part of the whole universe, the organism, as Self.*

3.2. The first level error: We accept only part of the psyche as Self.

This is the level of error that Focusing, like other psychotherapies, mostly addresses. (The way I would like ‘psyche’ to be understood here, is as the totality of the mental objects that the Self *can* witness. These objects do not necessarily have to be consciously represented, so they could be repressed emotions or temporarily forgotten events. All processes of thought, emotion, memory, perception, ESP, dreaming etc. — also any fractions or complex and/or recurring composites thereof such as habits, traits, attitudes etc. — are included.) In the course of our psychological development, we learn to continually weave a multilayered

self-image from certain parts of the psyche (at the exclusion of others) with which we then identify. We split our own psyche in (at least) two factions: all the aspects that support my identification and the ‘others’ that do not fit the image that I have of myself. We invariably end up with a ‘false self’.

3.2.1. Creating a shadow

The numerous aspects of the psyche that we exclude become estranged, split off or exiled. They become our ‘shadow’ and disappear in the dark recesses of the unconscious. If the now disidentified-from aspects make themselves known at all, they are misinterpreted from the usually entirely opposite point of view of the imagined ‘self’. When we totally deny the existence of these aspects, they become a challenge to work with, as they now can almost only be perceived as a projection onto other people. The results are distorted perception and flawed processing of reality, leaving all sorts of psychological problems in its wake. The more limited and rigidly the self-image is defined, the more our world view becomes colored and slanted and the less adjusted we are to respond freely and intelligently to life’s challenges. The effects of attempting to define the Self as a limited part of the whole are similar to playing solitaire with only half a deck of cards — no solution is possible. Understandably, becoming complete, a ‘whole person’, is sometimes named as a — possibly not realistic — goal to be achieved.

3.2.2. Defending our threatened image

When the image we create of ourselves is threatened by others, we often make extensive efforts to prove that whoever plays the ‘offensive’ part in a given situation (spouse, coworker, etc.) is wrong, the cause for any possible problem and hence, the culprit. For example, if one has a self-image of being smart, decisive and thorough — which in many situations might in fact be so — it may be hard to concede that at times one is wrong, indecisive, and not thorough, at all.

Usually the progression of life itself destroys our chosen self-image. Our youth or beauty fades; we might lose possessions, job, or family. We then have an ‘identity crisis’, which in reality is a misnomer, as our identity, that which we really are, remains untouched throughout. The crisis is the crumbling of a notion of the Self that is not in alignment with truth.

3.2.3 If I am not my bad habits, then who am I?

Quite a few people who — despite a high level of motivation, and commitment to self-help work (therapy, yoga, spiritual practice, etc.) — have difficulty moving beyond the glass ceiling of ‘false identification’. Their sense of identity is often unconsciously tied into certain sets of habits — and altering those habits is often confused with losing their identity. This dilemma is difficult to solve unless the person is able go beyond the level of the original problem to tackle the underlying identification issue.

3.3. The second level error: We accept only part of the whole universe, the organism, as Self.

This second level of error is also addressed in Focusing literature, but sometimes more obscured and less recognized.

3.3.1. Feeling lacking, looking for completion

At times, people live in a state of restlessness, trying to find whatever they think will make them whole and complete. That could be the perfect mate, job, house, break-through in therapy. It is not uncommon to periodically consider ourselves imperfect, incomplete, lacking, not secure, dependent, insignificant, adverse to certain conditions and people, finite, time-bound, isolated, etc.

These considerations are appropriate as an assessment of the transient organism. They are not a misapprehension of a deranged mind that is in serious need of psychotherapy. As a part of a whole — namely the universe — the organism *is* incomplete and can never become the whole; to pretend this possibility exists is either a gross misunderstanding or a vicious deception. A living organism does need and depend on a lot of things for mere survival, which is a never-ending maintenance project, often being threatened or consumed by some entropy or other. Death looms over our heads like the sword of Damocles, ready to strike at any time. This is a fact, a truth that does not require correction.

The error here lies in mistaking this organism for the Self. No wonder we do not feel good, when we assume we are subject to its limitations. Here are a few reasons why the organism could not possibly be the Self:

3.3.2. The organism is not an isolatable entity.

As Gendlin frequently points out: The organism is not a separate, isolated unit, independent from its environment — it is a living process, which includes its environment. The body is continually transformed in an ongoing exchange of ‘matter’ with its surrounding environment and needs air, water, food, shelter etc. Without the environment it withers in no time.

The psyche, as well, is entirely dependent for its existence on something outside of itself. It is not unlike a massive computer, mostly programmed emotionally and cognitively by a motley crew of people — parents, siblings, relatives, peers, teachers, TV, movies, books, internet, etc. — so it should not come as a complete surprise that not all programs are compatible with each other. We spend a good portion of our time trying to work out the bugs in the software (or at least most Focusers do). Who or what determined large segments of these programs lies in the distant past and outside the organism. The language for our thoughts and the cognitive, emotional, behavioral patterns originate outside the psyche, affected by the people who surround us with their vastly differing skills, backgrounds, interests and motives. Even if the psyche is performing well, its content continually changes on several levels dependent upon what is going on around us.

3.3.3. *The organism is in constant flux.*

The whole organism is an open system, in constant flux, with all cells exchanged in our body every so often, and thoughts, emotions, and attitudes always changing, as well. To mistake the organism for one's Self would mean having to find something unchanging within it and pin one's identity on it. That, of course, is impossible as there *is* nothing unchanging about the organism.

An identity being needed and the real one unknown, we create an illusory 'self', consisting of images, which we then believe and perpetuate. We hold on, get attached to these images and mind sets, which through our attachment seem steady, more or less, and the thought of losing any of them is considered a threat to one's identity.

3.3.4. *Exactly which organism is supposed to be the Self?*

It is not even possible to figure out which organism is the Self, since both its components — the body and the psyche — are forever in flux, are open, dynamic processes and not a closed, stable system. The organism is alive; it is being born, growing up, maturing, decaying, dying. Both physically and psychologically the various stages of the organism — baby, child, adolescent, adult, aging — differ greatly from each other. Is the 'real organism' the one at 5, at 15, at 25, at 45 — or even at 65, and 85? Is the 'real organism' the one who is in the shower, or on the phone with a friend? Is it the one who has just had a meal or the one buzzing with sexual hormones? What about us is essential? What is incidental? Given that everything concerning the organism is incidental, does that mean '*There is nothing essential about us*', or rather that '*We are not the organism*'? 'Nothing essential about us' would mean, 'no Self surviving time'. This is not our experience, as our sense of 'me' remains through all experiences, thus leaving us with the realization that '*the Self is not the conditioned organism*'.

4. CLEARING A SPACE — CONTENTMENT AND THE SUBJECT

Now that we have more clarity about the root of the problem, let us turn to the solution: How using Focusing in its current form has the potential to be at the leading edge of providing an alternative view of the nature of the Self and a method for obtaining a reliable source for contentment. Three effects of Clearing a Space can be distinguished:

4.1. Creating psychological space for a 'positive set'

I begin a regular, 'classic' Focusing session with Clearing a Space, which, in more ways than one, for me is the heart of Focusing, as it lays the base for everything else that is to follow. Let me walk you through it:

I instruct the focuser to: "*Let all these problems come up and out: everything that is keeping you from feeling absolutely content right now*" (Gendlin, 1978, p.52). I have him imagine making a list of the problems, or stacking them in front of him, or putting down the weight of them. No matter how I go about it, the first goal is to get the body "*uncramped*",

to get immediate relief from being overwhelmed by a state of emotional upheaval, and to produce a temporary calming of the agitated mind which the focuser may have brought into the session. I help create psychological ‘space’ or at least ‘some breathing room’ from a plethora of issues he might feel within the body, either by having him move them out or simply list them (more on which of the two to use later). I also introduce (or remind him of) the fact that the witnessing Self is *not identical with* what is witnessed. With each item, I can get him started on becoming more aware of the witnessing Self. “So *there* is that tightness in the stomach about your sister, and *here* you are ‘being a witness to this tightness *there*’ (or ‘the Self, noticing what is over *there*’ or something similar).

In Focusing, having at least *some* space from the experiences is not negotiable, as the distinction between the *witnessing Self* and the ongoing experiences is key to the process. This distinction gets initiated during Clearing a Space and is continued with ‘Finding the Right Distance’ throughout the session.

Gaining psychological space sets the tone for the remainder of the session; I might propose, “*You give yourself what might be called a ‘positive set’. You put yourself into a state of mind and body in which the other focusing movements can take place freely. (...) until it is done, the rest of the work can’t begin at all*” (Gendlin, 1978 p.71). Two remaining achievements weigh in even more heavily, which is why we need to attend to them in quite some detail.

4.2. Discovering a constant source of contentment

As we proceed through Clearing a Space, the focuser starts to unwind. There is increasing contentment, now that he shifts the attention from the issues to the witnessing Self instead. Once each and every issue has been ‘put out’ or ‘listed’, I invite him “allow yourself to have the attention ‘on the witnessing Self, (that which notices everything) which alone remains’ (or ‘rest in itself’ or ‘turn inward, toward the source of consciousness’, or whatever wording works best” for that particular client). The wording here becomes tricky as ‘attention’, ‘source of consciousness’ and ‘witnessing Self’ are really only various expressions for the same thing. It is important to keep in mind, that, since it is the *subject*, the witnessing Self cannot be addressed as an *object*, so the guiding instructions have to be phrased accordingly.

In a workshop, where this and other logical steps have already been taught *before* I do this exercise, this step is quite a bit easier than with a client who is just here to work, say, on his relationship with his sister, and where I might weave the logic into the interaction over a period of a few sessions.

I continue with: “Notice, what comes in the body *in reaction* to ‘spending time with the witness alone’” (or any wording that matches the one I have used before.) If the focuser reports anything less pleasant such as tension or anxiety, something might have come to the fore from some remote recess. I simply have him do another round of ‘clearing’ with this ‘something’ that is still in his space.

I should point out that, unless in a workshop with an emphasis on awakening to the true Self, focusers do not always go all the way with Clearing a Space, including a possible

“background feeling” (Gendlin, 1978, p.78). More often than not, people are drawn to some issue’s felt sense and eager to get on with it, as session time is precious, literally or figuratively. The first time I was able to have only the Self remain in my own sessions was because that day I really did not have much weighing on me, and I would have canceled the session, if it had not been for my therapist’s cancellation policy. What at first looked like a waste of money enabled me to “arrive at an opening out, a sense of vast space” (Gendlin, 1978, p.79).

Once the focuser has in fact proceeded until all that is left is the witnessing Self, the felt sense forming in response — while varying considerably — reflects something along the lines of: The body is relaxed, the thinking is calm, and he or she feels happy and at ease with him or herself. It is irrelevant how big the problems are or how upset the people were when they started the process; they do arrive at some individual expression of contentment, something ‘feeling good’.

Why is that so? Because when the space is cleared of issues and concerns, what remains is their very own Self. Focusers find out for themselves experientially (and, given some necessary logic, also understand intellectually), that this Self is not just temporarily causing this contentment, but can be a constant source of it, *if* and as long as they keep their attention on it; that, admittedly, is a substantial ‘if’ and not immediately achieved by everybody. The ‘intensity’ of the subjectively experienced contentment can go all the way to bliss and even ‘off the chart’ and is directly proportional to how much attention can be focused on the Self alone. Also, while the recognition of the Self is instantaneous, this insight is not necessary steady or stable, but at least the Self has been ‘registered’ experientially as a source for contentment. Still, maintaining a focus on the non-dual perspective of the Self and garnering the resulting contentment is something that requires practice, especially in less conducive circumstances, when the space is not clear, like in the midst of an emotional upheaval.

4.3. Empowerment through learning

Not usually looking to the Self for their contentment, finding a constant source for it there is like a revelation for many people. *Guiding people toward this discovery (entailing all the far-reaching, liberating implications) in my view is the greatest empowerment of them that Focusing can deliver.*

Enabling this outrageous revelation for me is similar to teaching some of the other basics — such as finding a felt sense or recognizing a felt shift — differentiating Focusing from other, more strictly non-directive, techniques. It is something that my clients would highly unlikely have gotten to by themselves; fortunately, finding the Self and the resulting contentment through Clearing a Space is a skill that can be learned, should the focuser be interested.

4.4. Why do we distinguish the Self through isolation?

When you place a perfectly clear crystal on a piece of red velvet, it will appear red; on green velvet it will appear green, etc. Even though it *appears* red or green, in reality it

has maintained its clear transparence. Similarly, whatever we bring into proximity of the witnessing Self will be apparently ‘coloring’ it with its respective qualities, making the true Self difficult to detect unless we isolate it.

Once all mental objects have been placed outside its immediate proximity, Clearing a Space is a wonderful venue to experience the intrinsic purity and clarity of the crystal-like witnessing Self. It is an important first step which later serves a central function — both in a person’s process and in his or her life in general — almost like the lighthouse beacon that guides ships to safe harbor, especially when lost in bad weather. Without all those mental objects crowding the inner space, the person can come home to the real ‘I’.

4.5. Differentiating the witnessing Self from our experiences

Exactly how far to take Clearing a Space obviously depends on what the client wants. Even outside of workshops, some of my clients who know about my background specifically bring up ‘spiritual’ issues and are open to learning and exploring, while for others, those would be the last things on their mind. What is appropriate can usually be easily ascertained, but sometimes it might be a judgment call on the spur of the moment: A couple of years ago, I conducted a few sessions with a new client, an elderly woman somewhat concerned about death, “bringing her affairs in order” and “losing the mind before losing the body”. She was neither religious nor spiritual, just very bright and sharp. In one of the sessions, we ‘Cleared a Space’ for a long time, and since there was not much time left anyway, it came to me to have her go past distinguishing her issues from her Self. I invited her to even distinguish from the Self various perceptions that she reported, like high-pitched sounds in her ears, the way that her back felt in the chair, and such. Just as with the issues, I had her simply list each perception *there* and contrasted that with ‘and *here* you are, noticing that sound (or feeling or whatever)’. At some point she became very still for a long time. Then she sighed deeply, opened her eyes, and simply stated: “Now THAT CANNOT die, can it?!” From the way she said it, it was clear that she had just understood something extremely profound. I just smiled at her. Her relief was clearly visible, and her whole face shined. She never once mentioned death after that.

For those focusers interested in philosophical and spiritual matters, it is important to realize in Clearing a Space that not only are they none of their problems, but they are not even any of their experiences; they are the unchanging witnessing presence which is aware of them. This additional clarification aids in getting an intellectual grasp on what the Self is, which in turn, aids in how they perceive their issues.

4.6. Creating space when something does not want to ‘go out’

However, there is another situation where a differentiation of the Self from all experiences is helpful: when a particular bodily feeling does not want to ‘go out’ or lessen in intensity. Here my best bet is to point out the difference between the witnessing Self and these issues, as I guide the focuser to identify them and get some *psychological* space from them. ‘So that tension is right *there* in the stomach that does not want to budge and *here* you are, the witnessing presence, which is aware of all that going on *there*’. If this is a recurring

situation with the focuser, before we get started (or even after we have finished), I might even briefly point out: “*Under all the packages each of us carries, a different Self can be discovered. You are not any of the things you have set aside. You are no content at all*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.79). ‘You are *not* the experiences, not the bodily sensations, not the emotions, not the thoughts. You are the (witnessing) Self, the subject, which is aware of whatever objects arise in consciousness. On one hand, *here* is the subject, the Self, which is timeless/changeless, limitless, absolute existence/consciousness; on the other, *there* are the objects of the world/of consciousness, including the body-mind organism, which are forever changing, limited in space and time, not absolute, but utterly dependent on the witnessing Self without which they enjoy no reality whatsoever’.

The psychological space that is created (and experienced!) once the focusers understand that they and their experiences are in two distinctly different categories/orders of reality can even be more robust than when simply making a list, stacking them in front or putting down the weight of them.

4.7. Starting the session on the right foot and ‘keeping the eyes on the prize’

Because the Self is unchanging, it is not only utterly invulnerable, regardless of what might happen in the psyche, but it also cannot be improved — which brings yet another type of relief. It is *already* the source of contentment, the sense of feeling full and complete. Consequently, once this is understood, the intention in Focusing is shifted from unnecessary attempts to make the Self ‘whole’ to resolving the issues that draw attention away from enjoying the contentment of which it is a source and the wholeness which is its very nature.

Approaching an issue while trapped in delusions of lack or inadequacy attracts and/or creates more of the same. Instead, when we know our Self as the formless, changeless witness, sense the contentment which comes when we rest our attention on it and remain rooted in (or at least always return to) its compassion that is an integral part of impartiality, we reinforce the positive tone we set for the session. From this home base of contentment we are in a strong position to create and foster more contentment in the world of form, specifically in those aspects of the psyche stuck in sorrow or turmoil. Establishing this home base is yet another important function of Clearing a Space.

4.8. Special considerations

There is no need to ‘move things out’ (which is, admittedly, not suitable for everybody) — it is only one of the possibilities listed in *Focusing* (pp. 71-82), anyway. Compile ‘things’ in a list, if preferred. For some, recognizing they are not ‘these things’ affords them the most space and comfort. People, especially those dissociated from their feelings, appreciate finding out for themselves that the Self is *always* invulnerable; it makes them feel safe enough to come in contact with their feelings. It is, of course, possible to process issues without attuning the psyche to the Self, when short on time. However, whenever we DO take the time, the reminder that we are truly much bigger than our issues or experiences greatly enhances our clarity and compassion in the rest of the session, if not transporting us into an entirely different realm of life altogether!

4.9. ‘Recognition of the Self’ and ‘Processing one’s Issues’ improve one another

In Clearing a Space the psyche learns about its relationship to the presence we call ‘I’. In order to know the effects that attending to this presence has on the psyche, we do what we always do in Focusing and what we do best with Focusing: Spending time with, paying attention to something unclear, allowing it to be as it is and becoming aware of (at first maybe only vaguely perceptible) bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and whatever else appears in connection to it. Focusing is the process through which we (1) first become clear on the subject, the witnessing Self, before we (2) become clear on the various objects, the issues, and (3) make sure we do not confuse the two with one another throughout the duration of the session (or of life, for that matter).

In many cases, one or more of the issues will demand the focuser’s attention with such vehemence that it is not possible to continue to go all the way with Clearing a Space. Progressing with one’s issues makes a more complete Clearing a Space in subsequent sessions possible. Conversely, Clearing a Space until only the witnessing Self is left seems to provide an empowering ‘higher’ perspective from which it is easier to process these issues. I consider recognition of the Self and processing one’s issues in the remainder of the session as very different, yet mutually enhancing parts of Focusing, *both* of which are necessary.

4.10. “A more effective and different way”

Hence: “*The mess will still be there and you will still have to clean it up*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.73). However, there is already a major shift in the perception of the nature of ‘the problem’ and its possible solutions, thus influencing the direction in which we are headed with the rest of our Focusing session. “*You have made yourself capable of handling it in a more effective and different way*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.73). We have seen how the organism becomes naturally and inescapably relaxed and full of contentment once the attention rests on its source. “*Let your body return to its natural state — which is perfect. The body can feel completely at ease and natural every moment. Just let it. Once your body is allowed to be itself, uncramped, it has the wisdom to deal with your problems*” (Gendlin, 1978, p.75). Indeed, with Clearing a Space, we have already helped the focusers achieve several things right at the beginning:

- Psychological space from the inner turmoil associated with their issues, creating a ‘positive set’
- Finding their true Self and with it a constant source of contentment
- Differentiating the Self from their experiences

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary

Already during Clearing a Space, Focusing can point to an alternative to the ‘pursuit of happiness’ and liberates us from seeing our contentment as dependent on fickle forces outside of our control. When we distinguish the true Self from its experiences, a major realization happens, as the Self turns out to be a constant source of what we always wanted — a

welcome relief. Consequently, now firmly based in a ‘positive set’, we might stop using our sessions for chasing contentment outside of our Self and instead focus on resolving issues stand in the way of our enjoying *the Self’s all goodness*. This involves welcoming and reintegrating ‘exiled parts’. The more our understanding becomes rooted in the non-dual Self as an unchanging source of the contentment we seek, the more conflicts and problems stemming from trying to achieve contentment outside of our Self become resolved. Problems stemming from clinging to outdated habits as part of our self-image vanish, when we use Focusing as a process to correct various errors in Self identification.

To what degree this article is able to unlock the unspeakable bliss available through the true Self remains to be seen; it might take sessions and/or workshops to succeed with that endeavor.

5.2. A brief outlook — Non-Dual Focusing

To complete the rendering of the Self and its oneness with all objects, it will be necessary to further describe their reality (and especially the nature of their relationship with the Self) and the implications this has for the ‘wholeness’ (in which we are interested). A more comprehensive description in turn, allows us to advance an evolution within the body of Focusing knowledge, as well as within the sessions of a single focuser beyond ‘relational’ (while still retaining it) — which describes duality, as it takes two to tango — to ‘non-dual’ — which describes an *essential* unity which is not to be confused with the frequent non-differentiation, the ‘mergedness’ of the witness with his experiences.

In Non-Dual Focusing — once the nature of both the subject and the objects is understood as that between essence and form — the focuser can explore any felt sense from within it, *as though* ‘becoming this specific form’ or ‘being it’ without even the slightest chance of any harm as they ‘exist’ in different orders of ‘reality’. ‘Entering’ into and ‘being’ the felt senses in question accelerates the process of aligning the experiencing and functioning of the organism to the wholeness, which is not something to be achieved, but rather, of which the organism is already an integral part.

Understanding and incorporating the *whole universe as Self* eventually leads to dramatic shifts in lifestyle, as ‘living for the benefit of the whole’ is adapted as a value reflecting this appreciation. We compassionately embrace and warmly welcome home *everything*, all aspects of our fleeting experiences, knowing they all are ‘I’ in this continual creative process of becoming.

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PART 3

CROSSING FOCUSING



FOCUSING-ORIENTED ART THERAPY

Laury Rappaport, Ph.D., ATR-BC, REAT

*“Creative people have probably always used this method. What is really new...
is the specificity to describe the steps and teach them.*

— Eugene T. Gendlin

Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy is a theoretical and methodological approach that synthesizes Gendlin’s Focusing method, the principles of Focusing-Oriented Therapy, and Art Therapy theory and practice (Gendlin, 1981a; 1996). I coined the phrase, Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy, as a recognized approach within the field of art therapy.

Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy is used with individuals, couples, families, and groups in a variety of settings such as psychiatric hospitals, day treatment programs, nursing homes, schools, prisons, and more. Although Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy (FOAT) is a new term, the application of combining Focusing with art therapy has been explored by both Focusing therapists (Ikemi, Yano, Miyake, and Matsuoka, 2007; Leijssen, 1992; Marder, 1997; Murayama, 1988; Neagu, 1988; and Tsuchie, 2003), as well as expressive arts therapists (Merkur, 1997; Rappaport, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2005, 2008, and Knill, 2004).

BRIDGING FOCUSING AND ART THERAPY

Focusing is a mind/body practice of bringing a welcoming, friendly attitude toward one’s felt sense of an issue, situation, or experience — and taking time to hear its messages and meaning. Gendlin describes this need to combine the inner directed movement of Focusing with something that helps the *felt sense, our embodied knowing of*, to move outward. He states, “If therapy deals only with inner data, whether emotion or felt sense, it misses a crucial dimension of the process of change. Therapy must involve more than Focusing on inner data in reflective inner space. There also needs to be a movement outward, into interaction, Focusing as such does not sufficiently provide the moving out” (1991, p. 267).

The creative synthesis of integrating Focusing with art therapy is a perfect balance for accessing the inner felt sense while unfolding its wisdom through creative expression. Focusing and Art Therapy share common aspects, contributing to the ease of their integration. Both Focusing and art therapy arise out of our innate humanness. Focusing accesses the inner sanctum of our ongoing experiential process, while art is a natural expression for communication of life’s meaning. Although the profession of Art Therapy dates back to the 1940’s, its roots are traced back to indigenous cultures where the arts were integrated into daily life (Kramer, 2000; Malchiodi, 2003; Naumburg, 1950, 1953, 1966; Rubin, 1998; Ulman and Levy, 1981). This ancient and universal application of art is reflected in cave paintings, religious mandalas, Navajo sand paintings, rites of passage rituals, and in

healing ceremonies integrating decorative art with music and dance. Rhoda Kellogg (1967) noted universal characteristics in children's art cross culturally while Viktor Lowenfeld (1957) observed children's development expressed in predictable sequences in children's drawings.

Although Focusing and Art Therapy are different psychotherapeutic practices, they are both intrinsically compatible, as each model very naturally accesses the *felt sense* — a term coined by Gendlin to describe the experiential dimension that was discovered out of research with Carl Rogers on what led to successful psychotherapy (Gendlin, 1981a). In Focusing, the felt sense is accessed by bringing mindful attention along with a welcoming, friendly, accepting inner stance, known as “the Focusing Attitude.” towards an inner experience, i.e. sensations arising in the body.

Similarly, during an Art Therapy session, the felt sense is essentially engaged through the use of the body in artmaking. For example, the hand, arm, and torso are engaged while painting, drawing, or sculpting. The felt sense also implicitly informs color and material choice, the development of an image, and knowing when the art is completed. The “crossing” of the felt sense in Focusing and Art Therapy contribute to a natural creative synthesis, resulting in a comprehensive approach — Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy (FOAT). This article includes a summary of the foundational principles of FOAT, basic steps for symbolizing a felt sense in art, and an overview with case examples of the three basic approaches, namely, Clearing a Space with Art, Focusing-Oriented Art Psychotherapy, and Theme Directed FOAT. Benefits of FOAT are also included.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF FOCUSING-ORIENTED ART THERAPY (FOAT)

In keeping with Gendlin's approach, the underlying principles of FOAT emphasize the client's sense of safety first, above all interventions. Of primary importance is “the person in there.” Gendlin states, “In my student days, one of the most useful things anyone told me was: ‘There is always a person in there.’ In infants and in senile people, seemingly worthless people, and seemingly stupid children there *is* ‘someone in there’. Usually it is an embattled person struggling to live somehow with (or in spite of) all the inner and the outer content” (1996, p. 287). Safety for the “person in there” is established through therapeutic presence, the Focusing Attitude, clinical sensitivity, grounding, and reflection:

- 1. Therapeutic Presence:** This step begins with the therapist's awareness of his or her own state: Are you willing to be here? Are you willing to welcome and meet the “person in there”? Can you be mindful of your own issues and states of mind? Can you be friendly to your own self and the client's felt sense?
- 2. The Focusing Attitude:** A friendly, welcoming, accepting attitude is directed toward both the felt sense and unfolding Focusing process, as well as toward the creative process and art product.
- 3. Clinical Sensitivity:** It is important to be mindful of the needs of the clinical population you are working with and to adapt Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy accord-

ingly. For example, when working with clients who have experienced trauma or have severe mental illness, it is advisable to begin with eyes open, and not encourage closing the eyes until safety and grounding is firmly established within the client.

4. **Grounding:** It is helpful to see that clients can establish a safe connection with their body — being aware of their breath coming in and out of their body; body awareness, such as feet touching the floor, noticing where their hands are resting, etc.
5. **Reflection:** The therapist demonstrates empathic understanding in response to the client’s verbal, nonverbal, and artistic communication. Reflection can occur through:
 - a. *experiential listening*, in which the therapist says back to the client the heart and essence of their communication.
 - b. *artistic mirroring*, in which the therapist may reflect understanding through an artistic reflection (e.g. drawing a shape, using a color, or creating an image).
 - c. *movement mirroring*, in which the therapist conveys understanding through nonverbal body movement or gesture.

SYMBOLIZING THE FELT SENSE IN ART

A basic step to integrate Art Therapy into Focusing is to express the felt sense in visual art. This requires bringing the Focusing Attitude (being friendly and welcoming) toward a felt sense, finding a handle/symbol as an image (or word, phrase, gesture, or sound), and expressing it in art (figure 1). If the symbol comes as a word, phrase, or gesture, the client is encouraged to express it in visual art through size, color, shape, etc. This process of listening to the felt sense and seeing whether there is an image that matches it is the source and inspiration for art making.

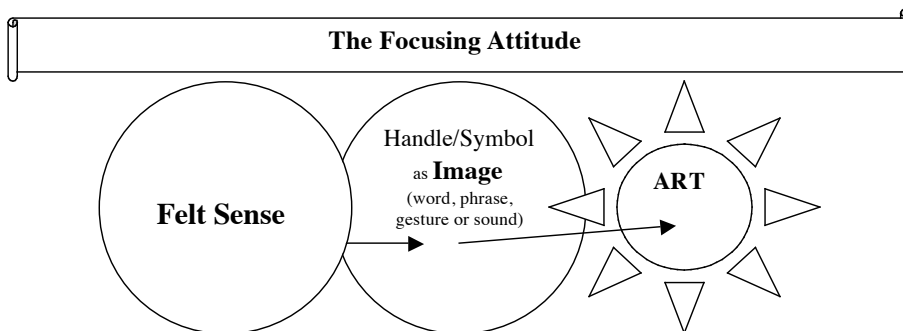


Figure 1: Expressing the Handle/Symbol in Art

FOAT APPROACHES

Gendlin's Focusing method is adapted to create three basic approaches in FOAT (Note: FOAT is an umbrella term covering the three approaches below): Clearing a Space with Art, Focusing-Oriented Art Psychotherapy, and Theme Directed FOAT. *Clearing a Space with Art* helps clients to have an experiential knowing that there is a self, separate from their issues, and that there is a place of inherent wholeness within. It is useful for stress reduction, as well as an entry point to the other two approaches. *Focusing-Oriented Art Psychotherapy* (more of an in-depth therapy) is primarily applied to individual and couples' therapy where the issues arise out of the client's experiencing and the orientation is toward insight. A *Theme-Directed* approach is primarily used with groups, in which topics related to the groups needs, such as strengths, fears, hopes, life balance, and so forth are explored.

Table 1 shows how Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy corresponds to Gendlin's six-step Focusing method (Gendlin, 1981a), followed by Basic Instructions for guiding FOAT.

Table 1: Gendlin's Focusing Steps and Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy

Gendlin's 6 Step Focusing Method	Focusing	Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy
1. Clearing A Space	Inwardly sense what's in the way of feeling all fine	Clearing a Space with Art Use art materials to set things at a distance; artistic representation of "All-Fine Place"
2. Choose Something to work on and finding a Felt Sense	Choose something from issues set aside during Clearing A Space	Focusing-Oriented Art Psychotherapy Choose something from issues set aside during Clearing A Space; or begin with this step: "What's needing my attention right now?" Theme Directed: Focus on theme; Get a felt sense
3. Handle/Symbol	Handle: word, phrase, image, gesture, sound	Handle: Image (or word, phrase, gesture, sound)
4. Resonate	Check handle against felt sense to see if it is right	Check handle against felt sense to see if it is right; Sense the right art materials to match the felt sense; Express handle/symbol in art

<p>5. Ask</p>	<p>Ask the felt sense questions: What makes it so _____? What's the crux of it? What would it be like if it were all resolved? What's in the way? What's needed? What's a small step in the right direction?</p>	<p>Ask the felt sense questions: What makes it so _____? What's the crux of it? What would it be like if it were all resolved? What's in the way? What's needed? What's a small step in the right direction?</p> <p>Dialogue with art: What do you have to say to me? What do you need? Dialogue with different parts Gestalt the art Active imagination Felt Sense of Art (word, phrase, gesture, sound) into intermodal transfer</p>
<p>6. Receive</p>	<p>Receive and welcome what comes (from the felt sense)</p>	<p>Receive and welcome what comes from the felt sense and from the art</p>

Exercise 1: Basic Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy Guided Instructions

1. Clearing A Space:

Take a few deep breaths down inside of your body. Feel the support of the chair that you're sitting on, the earth beneath your feet, and being here. Follow your breath inside of your body and notice how it is inside right now. . . Is it jumpy, or calm, tight, warm . . . or something else? See if you can be friendly to whatever you find. Imagine you're sitting somewhere peaceful. It may a place you already know or one that you make up in your imagination. Once you have that place, ask, "What's between me and feeling 'All Fine' right now?" As each thing comes up, imagine wrapping it up into a package, or using other imagery to set it at a distance from you. Some people imagine placing it on a boat and then letting the boat go a certain distance out on a lake. Others imagine placing it in a balloon and letting it go up in the sky. . . (Pause). When the list stops, check again, "Except for all of that, I'm all fine, right?" If something else comes up, set that a distance outside of your body . . . (Pause).

Background Feeling: See if there's a background feeling, an *always* feeling, like *always* kind of tense, or *always* kind of anxious." (*Pause*) . . . and set that at a comfortable distance too. . . Check again, "Except for all of that, I'm all fine...all right?"

All Fine Place: Take a moment and sense the "All Fine" Place. See if there's an image (or word, phrase, gesture, or sound) that matches or acts like a handle for the inner felt sense. (Option: Stop here and create art from Step 1).

2. Choosing something to work on and getting a felt sense:

As you look over at the things you set down, see if there's something needing your attention right now. You can ask your body sense if something is wanting your attention — or you can choose something that you'd like to work on. Check with your body to see if you have its permission to Focus on it.

Felt Sense: Take a moment to sense the whole issue freshly . . . notice how it feels in your body. (*Pause*). Gently ask, "What's the whole feel of this?"

3. Finding a Handle/Symbol:

See if there's an image (or word, phrase, gesture, or sound) that matches or acts like a handle for the inner felt sense.

4. Resonate with Artistic Expression:

Check your word, phrase, gesture or sound for a sense of rightness within your body. If it doesn't feel right, let it go and invite a new word, phrase, image, gesture, or sound to come. When you're ready, gently open your eyes, and create an artistic expression of your felt sense image. (Option: to continue to the end of the guided Focusing and create art at the end).

5. Asking the Felt Sense:

(*After the client creates art*). We're going to ask the felt sense some questions. Some it will answer and some won't have relevance, so simply let those go. Feel free to close your eyes or to leave them open. Imagine sitting down next the felt sense, keeping it company. In a gentle way, ask it,

What makes it so _____?

What's the crux of it? Or, What's the main thing about it?

What's the worst of it?

- Imagine for a moment that this issue were all resolved. This is like looking the answer up in the back of the book. Sense inside your body what it

would look and feel like if this were all resolved? See if there's an image that matches or act like a handle for the inner felt sense of this issue all resolved.

When you're ready, ask:

- What's in the way (between the issue and resolution)?
- What's needed (to achieve this resolution)?
- What's one small step in the right direction?

6. Receive:

Welcome whatever comes. Create an artistic expression that matches the colors, shapes, or images that you received during the Focusing. Include what was meaningful to you during the Focusing.

CLEARING A SPACE WITH ART

In *Clearing a Space with Art*, the client identifies the issues that stand in the way of feeling “all fine” and imagines placing them at a distance outside of the body. Imagery is incorporated in helping to clear the space. For example, the client might imagine wrapping each issue up in a package and placing it at a comfortable distance, or putting a concern or problem on a boat and letting it float out on a lake. Art is incorporated in order to concretize and symbolize the felt sense of the issues being set aside. After clearing the issues, the client gets a felt sense of the “all fine place” and symbolizes it in art. At times, clients feel they have already set their issues aside, using their imaginations, and prefer only to create the “all fine place.”

Nicole, describes the painting (Figure 2) that came out of her experience of doing the Clearing a Space exercise:



Figure 2 : “Clearing a Space” by Nicole

“In the image, I am blowing bubbles and watching them float away to a comfortable distance. Each bubble represents a different issue and concern. The beach is painted with bright colors of turquoise, pink, orange, and yellow — it is optimistic. I currently have the picture in my room, and when I am stressed I find myself looking at it. Through the image I am able to connect to my ‘all fine place’ and find solitude.”

Art Materials for Clearing A Space

A variety of art materials can be used, depending on the needs of the client population. For example, clients in a more regressed state will need to use art materials that are more controlled, such as pencils or markers as compared to watercolors. Higher functioning clients may enjoy a wide range of materials. Examples of art materials include: drawing materials, paint, assorted color papers to represent issues, clay, dough, modeling materials, found objects, boxes, containers, bags, yarn, twine, magazine photos and words.

FOCUSING-ORIENTED ART PSYCHOTHERAPY

In Focusing-Oriented Art Psychotherapy, art therapy can be integrated into Focusing instructions (such as Gendlin’s six-steps, Cornell, 1996, 2002; Hinterkopf, 1998) or interspersed in bits and pieces during a Focusing-Oriented psychotherapy encounter. The following example demonstrates how art therapy is integrated with Gendlin’s six-steps by inviting the client to express the handle of the felt sense as an image in visual art.

EXAMPLE: SARAH

Sarah is a 48 year old woman, a cancer survivor who came to see me for art therapy. Her goals were to learn tools for stress reduction and re-prioritize what holds meaning to her after facing a life threatening illness. Excerpts of dialogue are provided to demonstrate how Focusing and art therapy are integrated with each other into the session.

1. Clearing a Space:

Imagine you are in a peaceful place. It may be a place you know or it may be one you create in your imagination... When you’re ready, ask, “What’s in the way between me and feeling all fine right now?” As each thing comes up, imagine placing it at some distance from you... perhaps on a park bench... or on a boat that you can go a certain distance on a lake... as each thing arises, place it at a comfortable distance from you.

Sarah: *There’s friction with my partner... not exercising... the desire to have meaningful work.*

Therapist: *(After I say back the issues): Imagine wrapping each one up in a package and setting it at a comfortable distance away from you. Now check freshly... Aside*

from all of that, see if you are feeling “all fine”. (Sarah indicates “yes”. I invite her to see if there’s a background feeling, an ‘always’ feeling, in the way):

Sarah: *There’s the fear of a recurrence...*

Therapist: *See if you can be friendly to that fear... Can you imagine placing that at a distance from you with the others.*

Sarah: *Yes.* (Sarah indicates that she has set all the things in the way of feeling “all fine”).

Therapist: *See if there is a word, phrase, image, gesture, or sound that matches the felt sense of the “all fine place”.*

Sarah: *In my center, I see a yellow radiant ball of light.* Sarah creates the image (Figure 3):



Figure 3

Accessing the ball of light helps Sarah connect with her life affirming energy. We can stay with this step, Clearing a Space, or Sarah can move on if she would like to work on an issue.

2. Choose an Issue and Felt Sense:

(Sarah chooses to work on the fear of the cancer recurrence.)

Therapist: *Let your attention come down inside your body to the place of fear. See if you can be friendly to it. Imagine sitting down next it... sense the whole feel of it... see if there’s a word, phrase, image, gesture, or sound that matches the inner felt sense.*

3. Symbol/Handle: image (or word, phrase, gesture, sound)

Sarah opens her eyes, creates a rolled thin shape using model magic with a balloon shape at the end (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Sarah: *The thin part is the tightness in my throat—where the fear lives.*

4. Resonate:

(Pointing to the tight part in the art): This is the tightness in your throat where the fear lives. Check to see if the image and art materials match the felt sense.

5. Asking the felt sense:

Therapist: *Go back inside to the tightness and fear, keeping it company. Ask, “What makes it so tight and afraid?”*

6. Receive:

Sarah: *When I’m stressed, I get afraid the cancer will come back.*

(Alternating Asking and Receiving)...

Therapist: *You’re afraid the cancer will return when you are stressed. Can you ask it what it needs?*

Sarah: *It says singing helps.*

Therapist: *Would it like to sing now or would it like to imagine singing?*

Sarah: *It says it would like to imagine singing.*

Therapist: *Imagine a time when you were singing. Notice what it feels like in your body to sing. See if there’s an image, gesture, or sound that matches the inner felt sense...*

Sarah begins with a green oil pastel drawing from the bottom of the page upward and outward, with flowing open movements, adding yellow, red, purple, and blue (Figure 5).

Sarah: *When I imagined singing, the energy just went up — there was a release.*



Figure 5

(I set the two drawings next to each other.)

Sarah: *They're so different! The second one has such a healing feeling. I need to give this to myself. When I am afraid... this is something I can do... just imagining myself singing changes the feeling. I keep hearing, "I can't forget this. This is going to save my life."*

As I view the profound shift from the tight, restricted image of the first artistic expression to the open, flowing radiance of the second, Sarah's words, "This is going to save my life" reverberates throughout me. How powerful to be able to transform the energy and emotional state of fear to self-empowerment and hopeful possibility.

Therapist: *If you'd like, you can take your art and put it in a place you see everyday. The yellow ball of light can remind you of the place inside that is separate from all the stressors—your inner radiance. The drawing can remind you of the 'healing feeling' and to sing, or imagine singing to reduce the fear and stress.*

Four years have passed since this session; Sarah is living well, cancer free, and is a proud new mom!

THEME-DIRECTED FOAT

In Theme Directed FOAT, specific themes are selected to coordinate with the needs of a group or client. Instead of an issue arising from choosing something that was 'set aside' during Clearing A Space, a topic is chosen on which to Focus. This approach is useful for group work where the entire group can be led through a group Focusing at once. Focusing instructions can be amended to fit the needs of the clinical population (e.g. not closing eyes, helping the directions to be more concrete, etc.). Theme Directed groups can vary from one session to a specified number of weeks.

The following group is based on a twelve-week Theme Directed Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy approach on stress reduction with adult psychiatric clients in day treatment (see Table 2 for content outline). The overall design of the group follows, including the format, and one example.

Table 2: Group Themes and Skills: 12 weeks

Week	Theme	Goal
1	Introduction to Stress Management: goals of the group; psycho-educational presentation on stress management; Peaceful Place Exercise	Introduce members to group goals and each other; learn method of relaxation; express felt sense and see felt shift in art
2 and 3	Identifying and Releasing Bodily Tension	Learn a second relaxation exercise; mind/body awareness of stress and relaxation; felt sense and felt shift
4 and 5	Clearing a Space for Stress Reduction	Learn the first step of Focusing: stress reduction and wellbeing
6 and 7	Focusing Steps: Choosing an Issue to Work On	Learn how to work on an issue and identify steps towards change—felt sense art.
8-12	Practice: Relaxation, Focusing, Art Therapy Skills from Previous Weeks	Reinforce learning relaxation, Focusing and art therapy methods for self-care.

The group followed a similar overall format each week in which both Focusing and art therapy were implemented:

- Check-in
- Focusing Stress Check-in: identify tension in the body/symbolize as an image
- Draw felt sense image of stress
- Stress reduction exercise
- Focusing: identify tension in the body/symbolize as an image
- Drawing what the felt sense now
- Sharing

After introducing the group members to each other and stating the purpose of the group, the therapist led the group in a Focusing-Check-in to notice the places of stress and tension in the body, to get a felt sense as an image, and to express it in art. Afterwards, the therapist guided the group in the “Peaceful Place” exercise, followed by Focusing to get a felt sense as an image, and then to symbolize it in art.

Exercise 2: Focusing Stress Check-In

Take a few deep breaths into your body. Follow your breath down inside to your body and notice any places that feel tense or stressed. See if you can be friendly to whatever is there. Now, see if there's an image that acts like a handle for the inner felt sense of the stress or tension. Check it for a sense of rightness. When you're ready, draw the felt sense image.

Exercise 3: Peaceful Place and "Being friendly"

Imagine that you are somewhere peaceful. It may be a place that you know, or one that you make up in your imagination. Sense how it feels in your body . . . being friendly to what you find . . . (Pause). Now, see if there's an image that matches the inner felt sense. When you are ready, draw the felt sense image.

Lisa is a forty-three-year old client with a history of bipolar disorder. Lisa's first felt sense image (Figure.6) is a red, constricted vertical shape which she describes as a knot in her stomach.



Figure 6: Lisa, Felt Sense, Stress



Figure 7: Lisa, Peaceful Place

After imagining the issue resolved, Lisa's felt-sense image is transformed into a soft, strong yellow flower with a smooth, figure eight shape around it (Figure 7). Lisa shares, "I felt the tension in my stomach relax and change to peace."

FELT SHIFT IN THE BODY AND ART

Visual art conveys the felt sense, documents the felt shift, and carries the experience forward, as reflected in the case examples of Sarah and Lisa. While the felt shift can be seen in the changes from one piece of art to another, it is important to have the client notice the changes in the body. In Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy there is a back and forth checking in with the body, image, art materials, body, image and so forth. It is similar to the “zigzag” that Gendlin (2004) discusses, with the addition of art work. The power of viewing the felt sense visually is that client and therapist can view the exact same image that represents the felt sense — thereby increasing empathic understanding. In addition, the client can see how her inner experience has changed. The client sees a change in the image or the aesthetics, such as color, shape, media, etc. The client also has a visual reminder of the change and steps toward growth and healing.

INTEGRATING THE OTHER EXPRESSIVE ARTS

While this article emphasizes Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy, the basic theoretical framework and methodology is applicable to all of the expressive arts. The key element, symbolizing the felt sense, is the doorway to all of the arts.

Symbol/Handle	Expressive Arts Modality
Word or phrase ----- <i>develops into</i> -----	a poem or creative writing
Image ----- <i>develops into</i> -----	visual art
Gesture ----- <i>develops into</i> -----	movement or dance
Sound ----- <i>develops into</i> -----	music or sound exploration

CONCLUSION

In sum, the benefits of FOAT are as follows:

- Art externalizes, concretizes, and symbolizes a felt sense.
- The physical act of drawing helps the felt sense to open and move, thus bringing about a felt shift—enhancing the Life Forward Direction.
- The art product enables both the client (Focuser) and therapist to see the same image that symbolizes the felt sense.
- The visual art is a mirror of where the felt sense began, where the felt shifts occurred, and where it ended in the session.
- The art product can serve as a tangible reference point to review — to see growth and change (felt shifts).
- The client can take the art product with them as a reminder to integrate the experience into life.

- The felt sense grounds imagery with the body.
- The felt sense can guide the artistic process — informing choice of materials, colors, shapes, textures, and imagery.
- The felt sense unfolds the body's next steps (towards healing, change, wellness, etc.)
- The felt sense opens the door to the body's wisdom and creativity.

The many benefits experienced by clients demonstrate that Focusing and Art Therapy enhance one another. Art Therapy brings to Focusing an array of methods, tools, and materials, as well as an in-depth understanding of the healing power of imagery to give visual expression to the felt sense. Art Therapy also provides Focusing with a nonverbal modality to capture aspects of the felt sense beyond words, or before words. From the other direction, Focusing offers Art Therapy some awareness of the bodily felt experience and provides depth for working psychotherapeutically with concepts such as “the person in there”, presence, experiential listening, the therapeutic relationship, and the experiential dimension.

Note: This article includes excerpts from Laury Rappaport's newly published book, *Focusing-oriented art therapy: Accessing the body's wisdom and creative intelligence*, 2008, reprinted with permission from Jessica Kinglsey Publishers.

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FOCUSING AND WRITING ABOUT DOING THE DANCE

Tereza Crvenkovic

INTRODUCTION

My chief objective in writing this article is to demonstrate the wider application of Focusing and the felt sense in the pursuit of creative and/or expressive endeavours. Written from the perspective of my personal experience in researching and writing a Master of Philosophy thesis, I will show how my understanding of Focusing and the felt sense bridged two entirely different modes of expression: doing Croatian folk dance and writing about it. I hope that the reader will gain insight into the richness of the phenomena I present, and the unique possibilities inherent to having an awareness of Focusing and the felt sense of one's creative work.

BACKGROUND

As a child, I remember watching my mother spinning on stage. Although I had watched her spinning many times in the many different formations of the *kolo* (circle dance), this time I was intently aware of her skirt: I watched in awe, as the hemline furled and unfurled around her ankles, while she danced to the music of the *tamburica* (stringed instruments). I remember her beaming, smiling face, and her spontaneous high pitched yipping, 'Yu, yu, yu, yu, yu!', which was greeted with the loud approval of the audience.

For as long as I can remember, Croatian folk dance, music and song have been a part of my life. In fact, *folklor* (folklore) has not only been a part of my life, but an intrinsic part of life in my family. *Koleda* Croatian Folkloric Ensemble was founded in Sydney in 1967 by my parents, Ljubo Crvenkovic and Vera Crvenkovic, when I was three years old. Although my early upbringing was filled with the movement, sights and sounds of *Koleda*, my official Croatian folk dance training commenced later, at age twelve. My parents were initially reluctant to allow me to join the ranks of folklore dancers and singers, but for me, there was never any question about my involvement in the spinning circle of the *kolo*. For as long as I can remember, the urge 'to do' was always there: I wanted, or rather *had to* participate.

Many years later — exactly thirty years after the formation of *Koleda* — I had reached a turning point in my relationship to dancing in the *kolo*: now the urge 'to do' was enhanced by the urge to delve more deeply into my dance experience and to write about it. As I recall, there was a distinct sense of something wanting to be 'carried forward by explication' (Gendlin 1995), so I embarked on a formal research program as a postgraduate student at the Department of Performance Studies, The University of Sydney, Australia. What was most appealing was that my research program would involve the study of other dance and movement genres, embodiment theories, and the phenomenology of dance, which would culminate in writing a 60,000 word thesis.

At first, I imagined that writing about a passion which is ‘in my blood’ would be a relatively straightforward task. I could see myself writing with the same ease I experience when I dance in the *kolo*. I soon realised I was wrong. As my research progressed, not only was I required to examine a dance genre which I had taken for granted for almost a lifetime, I was also required to re-examine my own taken-for-granted ability to write about it.

In addition, I found much of the existing literature unrelated to my own rich experience of Croatian folk dance phenomena. More often than not, the various approaches adopted by dance scholars were either ‘missing the mark’, or conflicting with my own embodied understanding and felt knowing of Croatian folk dance. The various historical, cultural and gender theories were saying one thing, while my body knew more, knew better. Out of this, I soon realised that my chief objective in writing my thesis would be to try to get back to the original embodied experience of dance, with particular emphasis on folk dance.

Concurrent with my dance research, I commenced studies with my aunt, Nada Lou, to become a Focusing Trainer-in-Training. Driven by the desire to heal the legacy of a congenital condition which led to kidney failure, haemodialysis, and finally a kidney transplant at the age of twenty-seven, I enthusiastically embraced the training. Little did I know that this profound body-based process called Focusing would not only guide my healing process, but also provide the key to writing about my own body-based dance experience. As my understanding of Focusing and the felt sense deepened, so did my research and writing.

WRITING ABOUT DANCE EXPERIENCE

There are things I learned... with my body, and some of these things it has taken me years to learn to articulate in writing. But that is not to say that they were without meaning when I could only speak them through dance (Browning:1995:xi).

A common dilemma, shared by practitioners of many dance and movement genres, I believe, is to try to put into words what they actually do and feel when they dance. Indeed, the breadth of this massive, murky territory is so great that many dance practitioners may wonder about the futility of such an exercise, questioning, ‘Why bother?’ Some may argue that writing about dance experience detracts from the experience itself, while others may not consciously recognise the ability to crossover from one medium to another. Many simply do not know how to communicate what they do in language so that, to borrow Gendlin’s phrase, ‘the implicit intricacy continues to function’ (Gendlin 1991:18).

This was made clear to me in my very first dance writing endeavour. After an initial six-month period of researching dance texts and attending seminars on embodiment theories, I was asked to produce a long essay on any aspect of my dance experience. To ease myself into the task, I chose what is for me one of the most enjoyable aspects of Croatian folk dance performance, namely, wearing original folk costume. But as I started to write, I found myself grappling with my inability to explore my own dance experience while trying to integrate the theoretical models to support my argument. The end result was less than satisfactory: my sentences were stilted, my choice of words wrong. A flow was clearly missing.

From my previous experience in writing literary analyses and short-story fiction, I was aware that the writing required something altogether different. This writing was about something directly related to my own first-person experience of dancing steps and moving in a *kolo* (or circle) with other people. It was something directly related to the many auditory, olfactory, tactile and kinaesthetic sensations involved in wearing a costume. It was something about forming the right bell-shape with my skirt while rotating on my axis. It was something about knowing how far to lift my foot up and down from the floor, or knowing how much endurance is required to maintain movement in the *kolo*. It was something about having to be in-synch with a partner or a group of dancers. It was all of this, and much, much more. Ultimately, it was writing about things which are, according to phenomenologist Leder, always part of a 'corporeal gestalt' (1990:25).

Croatian folk dance — like other dance and movement genres — incorporates a complex fusion of finely tuned, yet shifting foci for the dancer. For me, the greatest challenge in writing about my dance experience was to learn how to isolate the shifting foci and other elements that are always inseparable in practice. In addition to this, I had to express what my body knows in an entirely different 'language' from Croatian folk dance. I could not convey my knowledge of doing the dance in the same way I did to an audience at a performance. I had to learn how to convey the doing to an audience of readers by bringing my experiences to life on a blank piece of paper. And in both cases, I had to ensure that my writing would resonate with dancers and non-dancers alike.

I was acutely aware of my frustration and disappointment in not achieving what I had set out to do. After a long discussion with my supervisor, I recognised that I would have to find a way to analyse aspects of my own dance experience, as much as I would have to acquire new discursive skills to experiment with forms of language and theoretical models. I realised that I had to develop or even discover an approach which would permit me to mediate between the two highly variable, yet equally valuable modes of expression: dance practice and discourse about it.

But where to start? At the time, I didn't consciously acknowledge that this approach was 'right in front of my nose'. In fact, I became increasingly reluctant to write, and even when I tried to, I found myself struggling, literally 'lost for words'. I was now in the midst of what is commonly known as writer's block.

FOCUSING AND WRITING

As I reflect on the presence of what I now call 'my writer's block'. I can no longer recall how long it lasted. I do recall, however, that I tried to rationalise its existence, reasoning that I was tired or that it was simply a 'passing phase.' Yet this so-called phase wasn't passing; it looked set to stay, and I finally reached a point of desperation.

The moment I decided to use Focusing to get in touch with the writer's block was neither planned, nor something I had consciously thought about. I was still fairly new to Focusing and was using it primarily to get in touch with the debilitating effects of years of medical intervention from my early childhood onwards. I didn't make the connection that

Focusing had other possible applications, especially in relation to the creative process, until one day, when I happened to stumble on it.

I vividly remember sitting at my desk, feeling a sense of desperation at the prospect of being unable to write, yet again. My long essay was in front of me, as well as a piece of blank paper for note taking. But instead of trying to rationalise away the block or fix it, I decided to consciously take my awareness to my felt sense. With this decision, I started to leaf through my long essay, reading and re-reading the material. All the while, I was checking and re-checking my felt sense in relation to what I was reading.

As I did so, I started to feel a sense of something different: Although I was aware that something was missing in my writing, the whole sense of what was missing started to open up. I realised that my writing was mimicking the style of other dance writers, and that 'I' was not being myself. In a bid to 'fit in', the foundation of my writing was not my felt experience of doing the dance, but the theories and writings of others. Instead of developing my own concepts and terms, I was trying to slot my writing into existing modes of discourse. And with this, I experienced a profound shift. I felt a great sense of relief, and with a big out-breath, knew exactly what I had to do.

As an experienced Focuser, I can now clearly identify what took place during this process: paradoxically, the shift in my writing came about by precisely being with the vague sense of what was missing, or rather, what was implied in that which was missing. This experience resonates with Gendlin's example of the 'blank' or in discussing the poet's creative process:

The poet stops in midst of an unfinished poem. How to go on?...

The poet reads and re-reads the lines. Where they end something does come!
The poet hears (knows, reads, senses...) what these lines need, want, demand, imply... What the next line must say is now already here — in a way...

The blank is vague, but it is also more precise than the poet can as yet say. It cannot be said in common phrases... This... demands and implies a new phrase that has not yet come. So the... is more precise than what has ever been said before in the history of the world (Gendlin 1991:19).

In the same way as the poet's process, there was a sense — through my Focusing — about what the written lines 'wanted', 'needed', or 'implied.' Rather than perceiving that which was missing as something that was simply missing, I found myself reading and sensing into what was *implied* by my bodily sense of what was missing. In effect, what I initially perceived as missing was now fraught with meaning and possibility. What's more, I was surprised by the exactitude of what was implied by the felt sense which would not 'let up' until I deciphered its meaning.

Because I deciphered the meaning of the felt sense, this exercise proved to be a turning point in my writing. On one level, I recognised that my felt experience of doing the dance was not so much 'missing', as it had been excluded from my writing. On another level,

I recognised, with absolute conviction, the primacy of the body in language and discourse. With these two insights, I experienced a transformation in my writing: instead of reaching another block, my felt sense implied better sentences, more well-rounded sentences, and words that reflected my experience of doing the dance more precisely. Perhaps even more significantly, my felt sense of that which was missing implied the next step in terms of my writing style. Because I was engaging with my own embodied experience, and because I would be combining theoretical and anecdotal material, there was a sense that ‘being myself’ would involve writing in a first-person, down-to-earth style. Although this first-person writing style was unfamiliar to me in my previous academic work, there was a knowing that such an approach would free up my writing, and allow me to engage with my dance experience more fully. All in all, through this exercise, I consciously discovered that ‘the written lines imply something that will revise — those very lines’ (Gendlin 1991:19).

In addition, I started to contemplate the natural connection between the felt sense and creativity. Gendlin has said that,

Creative people have probably always used this method [Focusing]. What is really new in it is the specificity with which we can describe the steps and teach them (1980:15).

As a person who considers herself ‘creative’, my first encounter with Focusing and the felt sense in terms of my writing was not entirely new. Prior to learning Focusing, I was marginally aware of the presence of a ‘fuzzy’ inner sense whenever I engaged in a broad range of expressive endeavours, including folk dancing, singing, playing the piano, and of course, writing. However, I neither had a name for it, nor could I completely identify its origins. What came to me after this first encounter, was the recognition that I had accessed what Gendlin variously refers to as the felt sense, the implicit and the direct referent, many times and to varying degrees, over and over again. What was different this time, and what has continued to be different since, was that I directly and consciously sought out, located and identified the felt sense in relation to both my writing and my dancing. I no longer perceived this part of my expressive and creative process as indefinable or mysterious, but as something I could deliberately and practically engage with. And I now had a name for it: the felt sense.¹

For me, the act of recognising that I could deliberately attend to and engage with the felt sense in relation to my creative work was revelatory: I started to see changes come about not only in my writing, but in the content of my work. As I consciously engaged with my felt sense in relation to my writing, I noticed a natural overlap between the felt sense related to my writing and the felt sense related to my felt experience of doing the dance. For example, I would check the rightness or wrongness of a word or phrase I used to describe a step or movement against my felt experience of a step or movement; often, I would also wait for a word to come out of my otherwise ‘word-less’ felt experience of a step or movement. In my research too, I found myself checking the rightness or wrongness of what I was reading against my own understanding and felt experience of doing the dance. In effect, I noticed an interactive process whereby each felt sense would inform the other, and vice versa.

Further, as I delved more deeply into my dance experience, an imperative need to move, to dance and to sing would often emerge out of the felt sense. Quite naturally, I would switch from the writing mode, to the dancing/performing mode and back, to elucidate and articulate my felt experience. I would repeatedly stamp out step sequences on the kitchen floor, clap out various syncopated and unsyncopated rhythms with my hands, and sing various song phrases in full voice. Guided by my felt sense, I employed these, and many similar methods, in an effort to get closer to the immediate, moment-to-moment awareness inherent to dance experience, and to give words to what up until now, had been ‘word-less.’

FOCUSING, THE FELT SENSE AND RESEARCH

As words were given to what had been up until now ‘word-less’, my writing progressed. But once again, I was faced with another obstacle. This time it was not writer’s block; it was something else altogether: I felt as though I had come up against a ‘wall’ with my research. Earlier, I mentioned how I found much of the existing literature unrelated to my own rich experience of Croatian folk dance phenomena. I also mentioned how I found the absence of phenomenologically dense descriptions bewildering, given that dance is concerned with living, breathing, moving bodies. I was once again confronted by the scarcity of appropriate material, except this time it was specifically in relation to the role and contribution of costume in dance.

What I was looking for was material which would resonate with my felt experience of wearing costume in the *kolo*: how the dancer ‘works’ the costume to visually emphasise and enhance movement through a range of shapes and effects; how it displays skill and technical mastery of a step or movement; how it smells, feels and even ‘sounds’ during movement; and how in some instances, it may even encumber movement. After scouring many dance texts, it appeared to me that the countless illustrative and pictorial images displaying dancers performing in costume far outweighed meaningful discourse on the subject. Overall, I was left with the impression that most scholars deem costume to be a purely decorative accessory in the dance, not a phenomenon in its own right. For me, the incongruity between this major facet of my felt experience in doing folk dance and the existing discourse was frustrating, and I had no idea how to proceed.

As my research continued, I turned to obscure texts in an attempt to discover something close to my own felt experience of the specialness integral to wearing costume. As I did so, I began to notice a vague yet familiar ‘smell’ wafting in and out of my conscious awareness. At first, I didn’t pay much attention to this smell; it seemed insignificant, and I chose to ignore it. Yet with time, the smell intensified, becoming more and more persistent. In effect, each time I sat down to research and troubleshoot the topic, the smell would emerge, without fail. It soon became apparent that this familiar smell was not unconnected from my work or the research at hand. Indeed, the smell was a ‘memory’ that came from my felt sense of wearing a particular costume during dance.²

When the smell first emerged, I immediately recognised its origin: it was the highly specific, deep, musty smell of a costume I have worn at performances and for special occasions since I was thirteen years old. The costume is an ‘original’, meaning that it was made

‘from scratch’ by a peasant woman in a small village in Croatia, over one hundred years ago. Each piece of costume — from the most basic item to the most intricate decorative feature — is hand-made: the heavy flax and linen material from which it was made is hand-woven; several panels on the back of the skirt, and the borders around the blouse sleeves and apron are hand-crocheted; the silk-thread floral motifs adorning the blouse and apron are hand-embroidered. The smell itself is a pungent combination of the age of the fabric and the accumulation of sweat from a lineage of dancers who have worn it, including me. The smell is not only a potent reminder of the antiquity of the garment and the dances, but embodies my experience of dancing in the *kolo*.

As I turned my attention to the musty smell in a Focusing way, other images, sensations and memories emerged: I recalled the dust inherent to this particular costume and my frequent hay fever attacks when I wore it; I saw an image of myself dancing, rotating around and around, with the pleated skirt trailing around me; I sensed its heaviness against my skin. As I reflected on these and other elements, I experienced a profound shift in relation to my research. My olfactory felt sense, with all of its inherent memories, images and sensations, was entreating me to ‘follow my nose’ and go to ‘the source,’ namely, the costumes and my felt experience of wearing them.

What was initially a difficult and frustrating task shifted to self-discovery as I extended my search to include the actual costume and footwear of Koleda, as well as photographs and video archives. I found myself sifting through and poring over literally hundreds of photographs of dancers in costume and movement, discovering previously overlooked details. I unfurled carefully folded aprons and skirts, dug out other dusty costumes deemed too antique to wear, admired the richness of the many textures, and the nuances and intricacies of the needlework. I wore various costume pieces and noticed the smell of each fabric, savouring the felt sense of just dancing, of just being in the *kolo*, coming to the surface. I found an amalgamation of auditory, olfactory, tactile, and kinaesthetic sensations: memories, performances, venues, incidents.

In amongst all of this, I found myself not only regarding what was previously disregarded, but perceiving what was previously unperceived. In short, as I reflected on my experience, I started to perceive my experience reflexively, finding what anthropologist Victor Turner describes as a hall of mirrors:

...magic mirrors, each interpreting as well as reflecting the images beamed to it, and flashed from one to the others (1986:24).

Ultimately, this process — facilitated by my awareness of Focusing and the felt sense — provided an entirely new methodology as both a participant and an observer in my study of Croatian folk costume and dance. In turn, the effects of this new methodology reverberated throughout my work, whereby I developed fresh arguments, and utilised a different approach in my discussion of the role of costume in folk dance. Following my nose to ‘the source’ freed me up to engage more creatively with the subject matter, which was appropriate, given that I was writing about the intricate interplay of the processes involved in the creation of dance and material culture.

While I was satisfied, even elated, with the end result, I began to contemplate the deeper ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ workings of the felt sense. Apart from reiterating the wider application of the felt sense in relation to theoretical discourse, writing and research, I was struck by the intricacy of its involvement in each situation and stage of my work as it unfolded. As Gendlin has said, “Our bodies feel a situation directly” (Gendlin, 1993:22). In the given situation, the deep, musty smell was an embodied response to the dilemma I experienced regarding my research. In fact, it was not only a response to the situation, but a solution. It was effectively what Gendlin refers to as ‘right next-step implying.’

Gendlin has said that “the body implies not just more, but the right next step” (1993:30). In this instance, and in the instance with my writer’s block, the felt sense led me to the right next step. On a deeper level, what I find even more compelling was the complex interaction of the felt sense with a range of existing factors: not only did it encompass my embodied experience and understanding of Croatian folk dance, but my knowledge of theory and discourse, and of course, language. Referring to the example in Einstein’s autobiography of the guiding ‘feeling’ he had while working on the problem that led to the theory of relativity, Gendlin says that,

Certainly by ‘feeling’ he didn’t mean an emotional reaction; he had a... that implied a further step that was hard to form. The body can imply something new, after it has absorbed language and humanly sophisticated knowledge. Einstein’s body learned a lot of math and physics. But the new step came not just from the math and physics. No new theory followed from those. That is why it was a problem. After absorbing all that, his body had gone on to imply a right next step (1993:30)

For me in my mini ‘Einstein moment’ — and many other Einstein moments — the right next-step implied by my felt sense was impeccably and finely tuned with all of the necessary elements already in-place.

Many others have also recognised the embodied nature of knowledge. Performance anthropologist Lowell Lewis has said that,

Our bodies are ‘knowing,’ they have a sort of ‘intelligence,’ precisely because our knowledge and intelligence are, and always were, embodied states’ (1995:232).

As a dancer, I can appreciate that intelligence and knowledge are not, as per the Cartesian mind-body split, simplistically located in my ‘head’ or ‘brain.’ I am aware of a certain intelligence in my feet when I stamp out a particular step, or the intelligence of my body in coordinating and adjusting many different body parts during rotation. As a writer, I am also aware that this embodied intelligence is the ‘backbone’ in my writing. However, what I find so unique about Gendlin’s description of Einstein’s ‘feeling,’ is the concession that all human knowledge, even math, physics and language, is embodied in a complex system of relationships.

This resonates not only with the examples I utilised for the sake of discussion, but with my greater experience in using Focusing and the felt sense to write about doing the dance. In the process of my research and writing, I was often surprised by the ingenuity and originality of what was coming out of me. In fact, in the early days, I expressed disbelief and wonder that it was possible for such ingenuity to come out of me at all. I'd frequently pose such questions as, 'How did it know what was needed?' or 'How did it know what to say?' As an experienced Focuser, I can now lay these questions to rest, with a straightforward, 'it knows.' And while I find these topics endlessly fascinating, I sometimes simply marvel at the rightness of the felt sense and the myriad ways in which it has shown me the right next step in my research, my writing, my dancing and ultimately, my healing.

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest lessons I learned in writing about doing the dance is that it is possible to do and sense so much more with one's body than language permits. As Browning puts it, 'the body is capable of understanding more things at once than can be articulated in language' (1995:13). Certainly, in embodied practice, it is possible to do many things at once. It is also possible to embody something so deeply through the 'blood, sweat and tears' of hours of training that doing many things at once becomes much like a 'second skin', a taken-for-granted aspect of one's self.

Apart from this, through Focusing and the felt sense, I have learned that language is not only an effective medium in mediating one's experience, but as Gendlin says, 'implicit in the whole human body... in our muscular movements and in every organ...' (2004:132). The lingering implication, from my own experience, is that there are opportunities for participants in other dance and movement genres to explore the wealth of their own experience through Focusing and the felt sense, not only as a means to enrich their own understanding, but to widen the range of discourse and the general understanding of dance and movement to humanity.

ENDNOTES

1. In her excellent article titled *Making the Unknown Known*, Mical Goldfarb (Sikkema) explores the relationship between felt bodily experience and the creative process, with specific reference to visual art. Describing the outcome of her interviews with a number of artists in relation to the felt sense, Goldfarb points out that,

... it became clear that although each artist could, with pause for reflection, speak of and describe the bodily experience of her or his creative process, it was not necessarily true that any one of them was aware that it was this felt experience that had been attended to while working. Thus, the felt sense guiding the bringing-into-being of a particular work of art was a touchstone for the artist outside of explicit awareness (in Sheets Johnstone (ed) 1992:184).

2. Gendlin elaborates on experiences that are like a felt sense except that they have not yet formed into such a distinct, direct object. As he says,

... most people don't know to turn their attention to their bodies so that these experiences could form and come as a felt sense. Or sometimes they do become a distinct felt sense, but not because the person deliberately lets it come. Such experiences are, therefore, spread out along a continuum from being hardly noticed at all the way to coming as a felt sense (1993:21).

Fortunately for me, the at-first seemingly insignificant smell evolved into a distinct and recognisable felt sense, which proved to be the catalyst in my research.

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CLEARING A SPACE ON THE WORKBENCH How Focusing Helps Me Build

David Orth

“Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.”
(Martin Heidegger, 1971, p. 160)

I was introduced to Focusing in the late 1970’s as a graduate assistant in a philosophy class on Tibetan Buddhism. It was taught by the phenomenologist and author, David Michael Levin, who felt that Gendlin’s book *Focusing* (1978), described something enough like Tibetan Buddhism to be a useful read for westerners unfamiliar with Asian thought. Assisting that class was a revelation, but I could not have known that 30 years later, the Focusing work would still touch my personal life or so shape my eventual career as a craftsman and designer.

I really had no business in a graduate program of philosophy. My career in philosophy was doomed by an inability to read Heidegger, Gendlin, or any other thinker that I really took to, without jumping up after an hour full of the book’s implications for life. Heidegger (it was obvious to me, if not to my teachers) had more to do with building tables, than reading another chapter of Heidegger. This is the inherent danger of the best books, and I include *Focusing* in that short list. Such books put me in the mood to get up and try something. The upside of this unfortunate behavior is my membership in the presumably small guild of craftsmen who have read Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* cover to cover, twice. The *Critique* was the first of several books to help me dispense with a certain kind of futile argumentation and get on with a different search — a search I believed could get underway on a well-worn workbench. *Focusing* was among the books that gave me a positive way of carrying on this search.

From the first read of *Focusing*, I was struck by the simplicity, directness, and pivotal quality of the process. It is true that Gendlin channels work that had gone on before and was going on concurrently, but it is equally true that he explored the territory anew and drew a newly intelligible, useful, and integrated map. I say this not to detract from the originality of this work, but to strengthen our sense of it as a weaving of many strands.

Throughout the 1980’s my sense of how and to what Focusing applied was ‘by the book’. I used it therapeutically to navigate my way through problematic life circumstances and my personal reactions to those many events. There was plenty of material to work with: a complicated religious upbringing, a divorce, a few years of commune life, the effective monasticism of a struggling furniture maker, and more. My life is an ongoing process, but in little pivotal ways Focusing has kept me coming back to the nuances of reality and generally sorting out the differences between emotional reactions, intellectual analysis, and real insight.

I didn't transition from philosophy to making things. I had always tried to improve on the world around me. At four, I took my Dad's claw hammer to the institutional parking sign where he worked; at six, I carved my name on the front porch of our rental; at eight, I had the other neighborhood boys making pretend smoking pipes out of expropriated road tar and something in the hot Texas alley we figured was bamboo. Occasionally, the improvements were more obvious — such as the endless kites and two or three excellent slingshots.

Philosophy was the digression; but it was an important one: first, as a safe environment in which to process that complicated religious upbringing — and secondly, as an awakening to the spiritual/cultural significance of serious craft. This awakening to the more subtle elements of building was a surprise development taking place in graduate school and reminding me that I should get back to my life as a builder. I hope to make the point that Focusing was a part of this awakening by showing that Focusing has elements of craft, and craft has elements of Focusing.

I was somewhat familiar with art therapy, but my connection between art and Focusing was different. My situation in the shop was not therapy. Sometimes it was why I needed therapy. The shop was a kind of cosmos of trouble and joy in which I moved around much of the day trying to coax pieces of wood or metal into useful orbits around each other without pinching my fingers more than absolutely necessary. An artist navigates an intricate, tricky territory. This is true in both the practical sense of handling difficult materials and tools, but it is even more true in the metaphorical sense of developing an honest, unmediated sense of design and aesthetic meaning.

It is easy to say that art requires a rapprochement between technical expertise and intuition. That is really not an observation as much as an after-the-fact analysis — a tautology, a truism. Finding that sweet spot where the engineer and the poet finally sit down to talk and work together takes time and is worked out in space with attention to what is happening both inside and out. Far from healing my life, shop work was its own little cosmos of difficult and provocative material. I do not want to make too much of this difference between working as a full-time, tradesman/artist and using art in other contexts. Obviously, there is overlap and useful metaphor between different worlds. A woodworker might find it useful to describe the 'poetry of a dovetail' or a writer 'the craft of words', but sometimes it is useful to play out the differences which are after all, what keep metaphor so interesting.

By the early 1990's, I had become aware that Focusing had gained a place in the shop alongside the tools and was about as pervasive as the sawdust and metal filings. Focusing had evolved into a necessary component of design and craftwork. In fact, Focusing took on unique properties when used in the very physical context of making things. The primary clue for me was a recurring, muddled sense that craftsmanship and Focusing shared both a deep logical structure and a special attitude toward their respective subjects. In this common space inside myself that they seemed to occupy, each played out in its own way — one as emotional healing, the other as ... well, these strange hybrid objects we call furniture and sculpture. I call them hybrid to capture a sometimes overlooked quality of made objects — that they are not just material/functional structures, but that they are full of meaning and embedded intent of one sort or another. Design is not so much style, as it is a way of thinking

and feeling in space. Tools are not inanimate objects, but are extensions of my body. Tools can cause effects, but they are equally windows through which to see.

Love, spirituality, and design have to be thoughtful. Clarifying the *kind* of thoughtfulness necessary proves the more difficult question. Most philosophy, theology, design theory and everyday opinion disappointed me. I noticed that the problem was not so much situated in the propositional content of a system, as in the thinking and feeling process that guided the speaker, the author, the school of thought or religious group. This underlying process was often perfunctory, dismissive, argumentative, self-referential, and one-sided. Along side my questions about thinking and feeling was a developing sense of craftsmanship. Designing and making are both questioning processes in time. The judgments of a craftsman are nimble and sometimes in motion. Craft favors receptivity, breadth, patient skill, and practical outcomes. Gendlin's process also had these telltale signs of craft that I was coming to see as essential to any kind of thoughtfulness. Focusing straddled Eastern and Western ideas; Focusing did not take sides between thinking and feeling, or between speech and experience. Focusing, too, was nimble, receptive, could manage complexities and looked for transformations. Rather than argue for one thing over another, Gendlin tends to align 'opposites' into disciplined working relationships with each other that glow with the craft of an honest search.

Let me illustrate this issue in another way. I was born into a family with two threads of work. The stronger thread (more of a cord) was teaching — I have three or four generations of schoolteachers and preachers on my father's side. The life of words in this conservative religious subculture held sway over my life and was alternately illuminating and darkening. To be fair, the culture was not precisely fundamentalist, but on some kind of scale it registered a seven or an eight, and it was a total milieu. My parents were and are very dedicated and loving parents who were much more humble and less severe than the forces that surrounded us. I have come to understand that the fundamentalist tendency is a universal, very human response to modern complexity and its relentless, often blundering reassignment of symbols and values. It eventually became clear to me that modernism, too, had its own variety of "fundamentalisms" that could pose as forms of science, art, personality theory or social reform. We all have an impulse to submerge troubling complexity and rich nuance by overriding them with hastily applied ideas, trendy phrases, and frustrated emotions.

During my childhood and young adulthood the rigor of the pervading "idea" was so great and thoroughly applied that a separation from some kinds of experience and questioning had to be carefully maintained. Experience is nuanced and tentative, and the community around me could not tolerate the corrosive effect this seemed to have on the system. To my constant surprise, questions could cause shaming or awkwardness. Unfamiliar phrasing, ideas, or desires might be dismissed as naïve, disrespectful, frightening, or sometimes treacherous. Much of the normal experience of a child, teenager, and young adult could not be discussed safely. After college I became very angry about this; but with time, I have realized that this narrowing is human and almost universal.

Why don't I dismiss this separation from experience out of hand? How can I say that it was sometimes illuminating? This is a difficult point to make — a point that is going somewhere, and so let me set it up. I'm not trying to do metaphysics and I'm not trying to make

a clear and precise epistemological abstraction. I am trying to gather a few words that can point to something we can see for ourselves, and frame in our own words.

Experience comes at us from the outside and from the inside. Experience feeds us, but *it also feeds on us*. In Eastern, Western, and Middle-Eastern wisdom traditions the things that feed on us, especially from the inside, are sometimes portrayed as animals — hungry lions, poisonous serpents, etc. Today we might speak of the tyranny of events or our habitual reactions. Nature gives us life, but eventually nature absorbs us. If nature has leeway, it literally eats us alive. This is true of both physical nature and our emotional ‘natures’. And so at times, a separation from experience can be life saving. And sometimes as a child a religious story, or an article of faith, or even a moral prohibition could help put some compassionate distance between me and the absorbing and dissolving forces of life. This creative separation from experience is so different from the dismissive separation from experience that is sometimes thought to be required by the system. When there is a *right* relationship with experience, the symbolic intellectual life can have a role in saving us from the emotional inertia and downward gravitational pull of daily life. So there is a tiny beautiful baby that can be saved out of what sometimes seems like an ocean of bathwater. The mind or the soul (let’s figure those out some other day!) allows for that illusive but real event of separation. Clearly this separation can get out of hand; it can be misunderstood and misapplied, but the point I want to make is that we cannot dispense with some tincture of a dividing, separating force. I will try to make a case that Focusing begins with the careful application of such a force.

In any kind of workshop you will see several kinds of tools — tools for cutting and tools for assembling. There are as many tools for separating and cutting as there are for binding together, maybe more: consider the variety of saws, the chisels and gouges of every size and shape, the half-dozen hand planes, a spokeshave, the cabinet scraper, shears, grinders, and plasma cutter. The craft of a careful, well-timed division is a thing of beauty — sometimes a terrifying beauty to be entertained after much consideration and a good night’s sleep. The cut is necessary, but it all turns on the sensitivity of the timing, the relative precision, the restraint, the respect for the material, and the watchful eye on the unfolding process. A careful cut can move things forward. A thoughtless cut will set things back. Focusing also requires such moments — and it is partly because of this that I think of Focusing as craft-like. Consider that ‘Clearing a Space’ is the critical act of separating from overwhelming emotions and defeating opinions. Even before Clearing a Space there is that wish for separation when something inside says, ‘No, I don’t want to freak out again’ — or ‘No, I can’t keep shoving this down’. These are breaks with the usual current and gravity of things. Gendlin understands that a separation from inner reactions is necessary, but that it must not be an absolute or sloppy separation. As in craft, it must be just so. Getting the useful distance from the emotional reaction is a critical part of the craft of Focusing. Too little separation and emotional (and mental) static continues to overwhelm the study. Too much separation, and the event is lost in the shadows — too far away to study.

When I feel back into my childhood, I see that this call for separation from the flow of experience had become too great, too generalized, and though I now hear faint echoes of a craft, there was no longer sufficient contact between the idea and the intricate complexity

for my emotional and intellectual process to carry on. The medieval alchemists (we should give them another look) spoke of ‘solvent’ and ‘binder’ forces that had to be applied carefully (in the right order, in the right strength) to the base metal in order to render it into gold. Transformation requires a knowledgeable, sensitive process of separation and joining. The ‘solvent’ of Clearing a Space and establishing a useful distance from my suffering is critically important, no matter how implicit the step may seem as we become more adept at Focusing.

On another day I would like to explore this question of separation from ordinary experience further. As an adult I have had several helpful encounters with other faiths and esoteric methods (both Eastern and Western). I have learned so much from these contacts, but in each case I felt that the system ceased to be transformational and flirted with manipulation when there was confusion in the ranks about this question of separation and joining. This craft of separation from reaction (and attraction) and joining to the body’s greater intricacy must play out just right. Gendlin seems consistent and strong on this question, but as we take Focusing in different directions, we must remember that the temptation to take short cuts and avoid the ‘craft’ is always there.

The other strand of work in my family is engineering, design and art. Although this thread seemed less important in my family value system, it was nevertheless operational and professionally pursued. These efforts were not considered intellectually, morally or spiritually valuable, but they were enjoyed as living skills and not discouraged in any way. Even as a child, I felt something ‘thick’ and ‘true’ about these things. In the context of these pursuits, complexity, nuance, and experience were treated by all as essential. Everyone understood the necessity for listening, practical understanding, and carefully applied skills. This experiential strand supported my sense of the reality and thickness of the ‘implicit intricacy.’

Gendlin’s book *A Process Model* (1997) illuminated for me more systematically the meaning of this implicit knowledge and gave me a practical understanding and strategy for understanding that the world was already a world of meaning — words and sensations were distinct, but truly woven together and interdependent. He understood that there were stops, places in life that didn’t work — that needed unraveling, that needed change. Transformation took place within this world of starts and stops, not in spite of it. Focusing and Gendlin’s Process Model were among the perspectives that helped to establish an authentic and benevolent connection between body and thought, between matter and meaning, between thinking and feeling. It became clearer to me that manual work need not be a mere necessity of life, but it could be a way of seeing the world and working within its flow and its resistance. It could be a way of Being-in-the-World, not just a method for making and fixing things. It was within the context of that thick intricacy that separation found its value and role as a prelude to the clearing of obstructions in the flow. Gendlin, along with others such as Martin Heidegger and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, laid out brand new roles for a craftsman. I could now think about and speak of this connection between thing and spirit. It finally made philosophical sense to me that working with my hands also meant working with feeling and intelligence. Craft, I could now say, was a way of seeing the world.

The world of the builder has value and meaning beyond pleasure or practicality. It does not have to be assigned a meaning. Already in the first grade, I knew in my body that

when I mixed green and yellow crayon on paper, something came alive in me. I knew I was not *just* combining colors or imitating nature. I felt something elevated, renewed and even truthful in this act. And although I didn't understand it conceptually, I would continue to feel this relationship between nature, handiwork and meaning throughout my childhood and early adult life.

Throughout my childhood, experience had been dismissed as a primary source of doctrinal error. Intuitively I knew this formulation was off, but I could not figure out why or how. These objects I was dedicated to designing and making were hybrid objects in the sense that the 'felt sense' is a hybrid thing of the body and of meaning. The objects I tried to build seemed to have one foot in the material world and another in a spiritual world — this made cognitive and emotional sense to me. The 'felt sense' — a concrete bodily sensation that harbored human meaning — had an analogous structure, which I experienced as both physical and meaningful. Gendlin gave me a structure with which I could discover how the spiritual dimension of life was hampered by events or carried forward by events. There are many sources of error. The special part of experience we call the 'felt sense' was not one of them. The felt sense opened things up and illuminated belief and artwork alike.

Lunchtime is a break from the dirty, loud, intensive environment of a working shop. We wash our hands, take a seat, have a drink to wash down a little sawdust and let out the breath. At least once a week, we take turns raising a question or observation about our work. Someone brought a polished, black marble sphere about 5 inches in diameter and passed it around. It fit the hand nicely and the weight of it could be felt throughout the body. The question was then raised, "What is the meaning of a sphere?" This was certainly an odd question that seemed to make a category mistake. How could a shape mean something? And yet there was this undeniable satisfaction in holding this inedible, inoperative thing. The satisfaction clearly ran throughout the body, the mind, and the feelings. Slowly, tentatively we entertained the idea that various meanings were clustered about this thing. We felt silly at first, but one by one words and phrases were ventured: *unity, completion, simplicity, singularity, intelligence, responsive, infinite, fluid, impenetrable, mysterious, drawing inward, consciousness and primordial.*

Of course, something weakly protested that these were mere associations, but we felt the weakness, the complaining tone, and the needless departure from the moment. Focusing does not tell me that a sphere means 'primordial'. Focusing is not a system that favors conclusions. Rather, Focusing outlines the components of a skill, which allows me to discover things — in this case how spirit and matter relate (or don't relate) in a given moment. This has implications across the human spectrum and certainly related to my efforts in the shop just as well as in the original therapeutic arena. Focusing, as I had understood it in the beginning, was a way of facing and understanding inner anxiety and reaction. But in time the Focusing process was also available when I was navigating creative territory in the shop.

Focusing is a self-correcting, iterative model for understanding. Several important characteristics follow from this. Focusing is a procedure that requires us to walk through a series of distinct, even contradictory, steps. We separate from something. We join to something that we had forgotten. Progress is often small, but it accumulates over time. Simplicity

is coaxed out of complexity. Complexity emerges out of simplicity. Understanding slowly aligns itself with something more genuine. Feedback in the system reflexively guides future interest and questioning. My body is intelligent. The body of my work is also intelligent — not because it is good or right, but because a question put to it with enough honesty will have its answer.

Let us say that I would like to design a cremation urn. I am not interested in the style of the piece or whether it looks like a familiar version of an urn. I put aside these ideas, but still there may lurk the unconscious idea of what a cremation urn is supposed to be. I find a way to separate even a little bit from this tug. I do not want to dismiss the past, but I do not want to let it choke me either. Something has got me wishing for more. I am interested in a design that might really help someone carry forward their loss and their love into their own evolving future. My goodness. Can an object really perform in that way?

I will explain why we must not answer that question. To make such a thing is certainly not a given. In this case it is a very distant, even presumptuous prospect. A system builder tends to “know” the answer already. They may have drawn a line between matter and meaning — which establishes for all time the impossibility. Or they may identify matter and meaning in one way or another such that meaning is reduced to function, symbol, politics, or the latest design school theory. It is not that these theories are wrong. Most of them are right in some way and played very important historical roles. I am a great fan of design theories. But you get the sense that they describe conclusions or prescribe the questions. If you begin with a theory, the real art is in discovering the way in which the theory really opens things up and avoiding the ways in which it dismisses intricacy. The theory is never *enough*. With or without a theory an iterative process begins with a muddle and a question that has more of a sense of being-in-between. It regards beliefs such as, “I can do this” or “I cannot do this” as obstacles or illusions. Both opinions shut down the more generative process and rich muddle in which incubation might take place. I must willingly hang out in that that place where I neither *know* nor *don't know*. In this place there is the more difficult thing of *let us see*. This will be a journey of unknown steps — steps unknown in both direction and number. Do you remember the childhood game in which you look for something your friend has hidden? You begin to look in whatever direction you can while your friend narrates the process as either ‘you are getting colder’ or ‘you are getting hotter’. Remember the excitement when your friend’s voice reaches a pitch and ‘you are about to burn yourself!’ Well, Focusing in this design scenario is the narrating friend telling us we are cold, warm, freezing, or hot. It is a real adventure and a real process. Many design sessions will end with ‘cold’ or ‘warm’ or ‘tepid’. Even though the end is not known, something inside knows when progress is being made or when the thread has been lost.

The urn design is something we can work on without first knowing which direction to turn or what exact step to take. The process keeps referring back to that sense of being hot or cold, so that even if I have started in the wrong direction, I am in some sense on the way. Ordinarily, we want to arrive at the solution so dearly that process seems like a terrible waste and distraction. But the truth, the hidden truth, is that real movement must be in time, in space, and from whatever place we happen to be. We don’t have to stop wishing to arrive, but we may have to stop wishing so hard. The interest in the search and especially in what

is happening right now must be stronger than such a wish for completion. Focusing does not tell us what is happening and certainly it does not tell us what will happen. It gives us a way to discover what is happening — bit by precious bit. Again, this makes the system builder in us very unhappy. This single fact, responsible for making Focusing so powerful, is exactly what makes it so difficult to communicate or accept. It requires our more squirrely efforts of perception, not the clarity of our pure thought. And the work it requires must unfold as we go. The muddle must be embraced. You trade in your certainty for the inscrutable real. Sometimes I am right there and able. Other times I have to get into real design trouble before I remember to try. Either way it is nothing short of a miracle to have this humbling and enabling realization.

I know that an urn must be a container — it must hold about two hundred cubic inches of ash. This is a clue — a little place to start. I know now to accept deeply within myself the mystery of this ash and that this urn must contain more than a volume. I allow myself to drop deep down into this question. I feel the hair rise on my arms — not out of fear — but out of a sense of inner vertigo. I stand inside myself at the sheer edge of a great depth and great height. I am already drawing lines.

If I cannot immediately find a piece of paper and a pencil, I draw in the air with my arms and fingers. Strangers look askance. My wife smiles. I look at the lines. Do they carry anything? Would they carry the dead in the hearts of the living? A ridiculous hope, but I try not to despair. I try again quickly, because I know there is a short window of time before the vertigo will pass. By now I have found some paper. I fill four pages with overlapping ideas. I look for any hint of mood, voice, adequacy or resonance. Here is a figure of curves and short, straight lines. It mumbles something. I bend my ear and ask it again. I try to pick out the word and drop out the static. I redraw. I look for an essence — the little whiff of anything. The distillation process is long and hard and may or may not be successful. There are dead ends. There are promising ideas for a coffee table. There are ideas that would exceed a customer's pocketbook. There are good ideas mixed with lesser ideas. But I relax and move on without further mental comment.

Every failure tells me something. I put it all down after an hour and come back the next day. There is no set time. It may all collapse neatly into a half hour process. More likely it draws out for a week or two. I reach an impasse and something gives up trying so hard. Often, it is within this moment of relaxation that has not completely forgotten the task — this moment of relaxing and remembering — that the illusive, critical line is drawn. I know this by a humble sense of alignment — something more than excitement or satisfaction. Sometimes a shape may glow and shimmer. A fresh breeze has blown in from somewhere. The vertigo has found some kind of handle — a shape that recalls something (never all) of the mystery.

The process has just begun. The singular shape must be broken down into components, specifications, numbers, sequences, actions, reactions, solutions, phone calls for parts, assessment of dangers, endurance, and so forth. When it is all done, the urn must voice a word. But in the meantime the voice is temporarily lost in translation. It is being spelled out. It is being articulated somewhat awkwardly syllable by syllable. In the end it must return from multiplicity to the single voice once heard. I listen to its sound. I check it again

for fit. I hear the way it fits, and I hear the way it does not fit. I log the information for the future. It will all form part of the new environment in which I will continue to work and design.

Design is not the only place where Focusing is useful and illuminating. The embodiment or incorporation of skill that a craftsman experiences is an intricate process that develops over time — it is not a given. Skill requires certain kinds of special efforts, and these efforts change location and meaning as the process evolves. When I first pick up a chisel and apply it to wood, my body feels clumsy. Sensation ends at my skin where I feel the wooden chisel handle in my hand as I blindly poke at the wood. When I bring the chisel up against the wood, I register the bump against my palm and the strain at my wrist or elbow. The body feels clumsily arranged between floor and wood. I try to be slower and more deliberate. The blade cuts a bit of wood and then jams. I feel strangely distant from the action — like I am at the end of a long tunnel trying to see some light at the other end. I get a message back from this distant frontier — it says push harder. I push harder, but it is too hard and the blade slips. A new message from the frontier says be more gentle, but when I lighten up, the blade jams again. This is a very strange moment that will eventually shape-shift if I can accept it as a normal stoppage and take a friendly look at it.

With practice, a bit of magic begins to happen. I stop simply trying to change the wood. I relax my frustration and try to receive something. I don't stop trying, but something more attentive comes forward that can listen at the same time. I see things I never saw before. I make guesses. I test the guesses. In fits and starts, my sensation moves out to the end of the blade. The tunnel shortens. My felt sense stretches from the inside. It stretches out toward the end of the blade. I feel the wood directly now. I am no longer receiving distant messages through the tool. The tool is now an extension of my hand. I can see through the tool, even as it acts on the wood. This shift of the body's boundary incorporates many nerve strands. I can *hear* the sharpness or dullness of the blade. I learn to apply some 'English' — some side pressure, some twist — just so. This nuance is too small to see, but I sense it from the inside.

Now, instead of these delayed carrier pigeon messages from the wood, I am seeing the wood through the tool. It is a different seeing. It speaks to me about which direction and how hard I should push. The work is actually magnified. The tool has a certain nerve structure and transparency. A sharp blade opens a window onto a molecular level. The wood is flush with new meaning. I feel the previously invisible direction of the wood grain. I feel the changes in hardness. The body has positioned itself differently. I am no longer awkwardly supported on the floor. Now the force comes up from the ground and through my body and does not stop until it reaches the wood. I feel a circuit close between the ground and the action at the wood. Something clumsy, dark, and stopped is now full of light and current. These things are magical, but they begin and are worked out within time. Sometimes a day or two of work suffices, but often it will take a year — maybe two, of struggle, relaxation of the struggle, and that crucial something which watches, studies, and waits. Clearly, Focusing can help us describe these transformations with fresh and more accurate words, but I am saying something more. Is it not apparent that something very much like Focusing is enabling and speeding along the transformation?

Here's a more familiar example. You are learning to ride a bicycle. This may have begun with an eagerness to learn or a fear of learning. Either is a place to begin. The bike is a fearful conglomeration of moving pedals, twisting handlebars, and a road rising up way too quickly to meet you. We call this process 'practice' and we say that practice requires 'patience', but we fail to notice the metaphysics and epistemology at work — the way that we must relax certain reactions and allow our sensation to move out to the business end of the wheels, the way the body merges with the bicycle and establishes new body/environment boundaries. For a while, you overreact to the sense of falling and begin to fall into the other direction. You are getting messages a little too late. You pump the peddles and yank the handlebars — you are all parts against parts. You are using the distant messages to reason about the handlebars and your center of gravity. You may have an instructor trying to help you with commands and encouragement. You try to take in the help, but it grates on you.

This is a beginning, but it is not enough. It's as if the nerve endings of your body need some time to grow down into the bike. The felt sense moves out from the flailing arms and legs down to the sidewalk and into the gravitational center of the person-on-a-bike you have become. You feel the momentum of your trajectory. It does not seem as fast or as furious with you. Your shape has shifted. You are a bike-body. There is an expansion and contraction of environment that has gone on. Now that you can ride a bike, you see the world differently. In some ways your world has narrowed — bumps in the road may be more interesting than passing flowers. In other ways your world has expanded — you feel a pull from the end of the block. You feel the arrogance, joy and vulnerability of fast things. You've endured a separation from your walking self and maybe your driving self — and all that signifies. You've relaxed that emotion of 'all the parts about to tangle and crash'. Should we say that you have found a new felt sense outside your skin where the rubber grips and slips upon the road? No, I think it more that the skin has moved out and the feeling and intelligence have moved out with it. The bike is now transparent as your eye is transparent. In some important though makeshift sense, it is part of your sensing body.

It is very important to understand the ways in which your body merges with new technology. You have extended capacities and narrowed capacities. A technology extends your vision in specific ways, but it does so at the expense of narrowing it in others. By shifting the range of our abilities and even our vision, tools and machinery can shift the way in which we are. Clearly this is something to wonder about. There are new opportunities accompanied by new limitations and dangers. Technologies extend and limit even the soul. Focusing can help us see clearly the range and significance of these changes.

Although the comparisons between Focusing by the book and Focusing as a skillful means continue to resonate for me, I do notice that the search for a handle may be quite different between the one and the other. Finding a handle in the usual sense is to discover words that adequately summarize or recall the felt sense. This word or phrase handle is an important part of the new understanding. Along with the handle, we feel a shift in the body. Slight or earthmoving, this shift is a new relationship to the problem.

In Focusing at the workbench, words may or may not come. I often find that they do come and form a part of the shifting process. If one wishes to teach, this is particularly useful. Yet often, there are no words. It is not that the shift comes without the same effort. The

search and testing are very much there, but instead of looking for and testing words, there is an analogous phase in which trajectories, balance, pressures, sounds, views, colors, lines and more are tested for fit and shift.

Word handles are very flexible, and it seems possible to sharpen them to a perfect point so that the felt sense is very accurately evoked by the carefully chosen phrase. However, at the workbench the handles seem harder to sharpen. There are other concerns that must find their way into the project. These concerns may be allowed into the protected space of the felt sense where they exert their own pressure. The urn must not tip over. The bronze must be crafted with respect for its molecular and cultural character. There is always the two hundred cubic inches — sometimes a designer wishes to be free of that. What can this number have to do with the felt sense? There is a sense that in the urn, many problems have been solved at once. Perhaps some of these issues have their own felt sense about them — consider the stability of the urn and the felt sense of that. Sometimes these other concerns seem to really contribute to the total understanding. But sometimes more solutions are simply more distracting and part of artistry is learning to submerge some issues that detract from the whole. For now, I want to state this problem without trying to solve it. From a strictly Focusing perspective, the art object includes the handle, but it is also more or less than the handle. Can it be a handle that grasps a multiplicity of other handles? Does this complexity express cosmos, or is this complexity dispersive? Perhaps we just have to wait and see.

My shop includes a small library, partly a hangover from my days as a philosophy student, but more immediately from the sense that the two ingredients of thought and praxis are always best served up together. My apprentices soon understand that ‘tools are ideas’, but it is much harder to convince them that ‘ideas are tools.’ I keep a paperback copy of *Focusing* on the shelves next to books on aesthetics, furniture design, and practical tricks of the trade, but I always have the darnedest time explaining why.

I remember a visiting tour of art students. After an hour talking in the gallery and the bench room, we ended up crowded into the library. Initially intrigued, the art professor asked me to pick out a single book that might be most useful for students to read. *Focusing* was my choice, and I tried to give a little synopsis of why it was so useful. The tension and excitement I had felt from students and teacher crowded so attentively into my studio dissolved into silence and blank stares. I went on explaining for another futile minute trying to make a connection. And so this public disconnect between thinking, feeling, and making came home to me once more.

It is easier to explain to Focusers the connection to craftwork, than it is to explain to craftsmen the connection to Focusing. With time I have learned to be more careful about how I place a book between a craftsman and his work. In the presence of intricacy all ideas seem trite.

Ideas are trite, that is, until they are needed to free a blockage in the intricate flow. Ideas meted out sparingly at the operative moment when their sharpness and force are actually needed are like jewels in acid — nothing trite about the way they now sparkle and sizzle.

I remember a few days of interesting struggle with an apprentice. He had been with me for six months and had learned to use some difficult tools to do some difficult work. At the time we were working together on a large, curvy, cherry table. It was time to smooth the wood. Cherry is a persnickety, gorgeous wood. Its grain direction changes on a dime. It splinters easily under a hand plane. Three hand tools were needed for the task: a hand plane, a spokeshave, and a scraper. Each tool worked on the cherry in a different, complementary way.

The apprentice had shown skill with each tool and so I abandoned him at his bench with the task of smoothing this monstrous conglomeration of rough saw marks, hardened glue, disparate joints, and crisscrossing grain patterns. I kept an eye out on what was happening, but I knew my input would not be useful at this time.

I stood at my own workbench, doing something with a little project. An afternoon and most of a morning went by. Though there was no apparent progress with the cherry table, I could hear serious efforts being made in the back room. At about 11 o'clock my normally respectful, self-controlled apprentice strode over to me in an obviously challenging mood. He was highly frustrated and visibly angry with me. He was not sure what to say, but he made it clear that I had abandoned him to an impossible task and that perhaps I did not really know how to teach. I nodded and we walked back to his bench where I assured him that he was right on both accounts.

The next ten minutes would be pivotal. Apprentices who have dedicated themselves for many months have left the program in these liminal moments. Not knowing the outcome, I nevertheless welcome this state of affairs in which very big ideas related and unrelated to Focusing become relevant and teachable. Ideas that have fallen softly against ears and been swept up with the wood shavings now become wonderfully subversive and effective — they glow with inner light and tingle with acidity. I wallow into the situation with this comment — that at the upper end of a craft one faces a series of impossibilities. At this level, the tools and procedures that have been taught don't quite suffice. Something more is needed. I cannot teach it. It is something only the student can bring. I am likely to call it 'attention', but I do not mean the usual concentration. Industry, I say, does not require this thing. This is the difference between industry and craft. Industry is a collection of procedures and machines that guarantee a result. Craft is different. Procedures do not always work and certainly there are no guarantees. Welcome, I say, to your troubled life as a craftsman. I say these words tenderly, with all the compassion that I feel. Each of these three tools that the apprentice uses complements the other, but also each undoes the work of the other. The plane smooths and flattens the wood until it hits a curly section of 'reaction wood' or until the grain changes direction unexpectedly. At this point the plane causes a deep tear-out in the wood. The scraper could have handled the difficult spot — had it been anticipated — but then it ruins the smooth geometry of the plane when used too much. I tell him he has to see things he cannot see. He has to see the precise moment a success is about to become a massive failure. He has to read the direction of the grain like a book. I can teach him to read, but I cannot read this book aloud to him. Being himself, the craftsman, the words are secret sounds and vibrations only he can feel. He must become as quick and precise on the inside as he has become on the outside.

Furthermore, I say, his frustrations and anger can no longer be background noise. He must attend to them with as much care as he brings to the wood. They are gifts and they must be unwrapped. As he is working on the wood, the wood works in the opposite direction right back onto him. If he wants the wood to relax its contrariness, he must notice his own. If the wood must change, then so must he. It's the law.

A thing or two more is said. The word 'Focusing' is never mentioned. He looks at me. I do not see belief in his eye, but I do see a new question. He seems ready to be left alone again, and I oblige.

I keep an eye on his work from a distance. He does not need to feel me watching. I hear a renewed effort. I hear an increasing steadiness and rhythm. And finally, it both surprises me and doesn't surprise me that in about twelve hours he has found a way to complete the task. I am happy that the work is done and done well. I am happy that he is happy. I am happy that something of the inner life of the craftsman has come to make sense to him.

Bringing Focusing to our work, whatever our work may be, can have the effect of elevating routine work to a new level of craft. But there is something brittle in labor that can resist the complexities of feeling and critical thought. And for thinkers and poets, there may be something aloof that resists the troubles of labor. Perhaps there can be an awakening for those who live primarily by their words and an awakening for those who live primarily by their hands. Focusing is clearly a tool to help with that awakening. The distances from head to heart to body — and from all to our work — are distances to be measured, triangulated, spanned, and relished, by all.

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THE WHOLEBODY FOCUSING STORY

Kevin McEvenue and Glenn Fleisch

This article is in two parts. The first part is the story of my (Kevin's) experience of combining two disciplines: the Alexander technique and Focusing. This integration, that I call Wholebody Focusing, has been unfolding and continually reinventing itself over the last twenty-eight years. In this article I want to demonstrate how the key elements of Focusing have transformed my experience of the Alexander technique and how the Alexander technique principles—how postural use affects body functioning—have enriched my Focusing experience in very specific ways.

Part I

WAKENING THE BODY WISDOM — AT THE EDGE OF AWARENESS

I am here at the very edge of a process that has evolved over many years of working with myself and others, and observing what happens when we connect with ourselves in this bodily way. I invite the body to do a specific activity in its own wisdom separate from my habitual pattern, which is often unconscious and dysfunctional. For example, I notice how my body prepares itself to make a tremendous effort to do something when effort isn't naturally required in this situation. Maybe the body in its wisdom can offer me an experience of a better way. In fact, this is how I introduce the first basic element of Wholebody Focusing.

While feeling grounded and present to myself, standing on my own two feet, I invite my body wisdom to raise my arms upwards from my sides in its own wisdom and deliberately step back from doing anything to make this happen. I also step back with the intention to unconditionally receive whatever comes as a bodily response to this invitation. The purpose of this exercise is to awaken a bodily felt connection between a sense *of me* and something *in me* that can respond to this invitation in a way that feels new, unfamiliar and yet just right. At the same time, the exercise raises the whole issue of control and gives me the opportunity to resist the impulse to *do something* at the very edge between doing and non-doing and to explore the power of *non-doing*. The process often brings up the fear of letting go of control. Maintaining control, the effort to do something just to try to stay alive, is so much a part of my survival instincts.

Many things do come, thoughts and body sensations that may seem to have nothing to do with my original intention, and yet I receive whatever comes just the way it is without judgment. There might be the usual mind chatter, the familiar fear of getting it right or wrong, or the temptation to make it happen, or the fear that nothing is going to happen unless I make it happen. Then gradually, I realize that some things are happening that seem intentional — maybe there is some movement and maybe there is nothing happening (and that is

something, too). If there is movement, I notice where it is. Since I am standing, I am probably swaying a little as the righting reflexes kick in to maintain balance. When I put a gentle awareness on this movement, more movement happens, maybe in other parts of the body too. Maybe the body is just realigning itself and yet what is happening seems to be purposeful. For example, the movement might be an indication towards something that needs to happen first, in order to enable the intention to be manifested. Maybe I need to feel my feet awaken, feel their connection to the ground, the awakening of legs and hips, all this so that my arms can feel the support they need in order to do something. Or maybe the movement is towards something that is *needed* even more than what I *wanted*.

In any case, something is happening. My body is coming alive from the inside because I have sent out this invitation to the body wisdom with an attitude of welcoming what comes into my awareness. In fact, this is what I am really looking for, this bodily awakening from inside; engaging my consciousness is my primary intention. Again, I recognize the purposefulness of these inner-directed movements and intentions that seem to originate from the body itself, and I give my consent to what is happening each step of the way. I also invite a relationship between a sense of me, standing on my own two feet, and what wants to happen in these different parts of me, and when I do, *more comes*.

What I notice is truly amazing. The experience I am having exemplifies the definition of “Wholebody Focusing”. What comes often feels fresh, new, and totally unexpected. My body feels full of life, effortless as though the whole body is totally engaged in this activity with a mind of its own — and it feels so right. I sense a whole new experience in this situation and a new experience of what can happen. I have learned from these experiences that the whole body needs to be dynamically involved to fundamentally change a function in any one part. I have also noticed that improved postural re-alignment changes dynamically how I think and feel about myself, and hence about life around me. In fact, Alex Maunder (a long time Alexander teacher and now a Focuser) suggested that in his experience, physical posture, alignment, and muscle tone can act as a solid support for new emotional and cognitive insights. I imagine this bodily experience I am having is something like what Alexander was so excited about in his own discovery — something he felt was so significant that he wanted the whole world to know. In Alexander’s words, “This work makes you an even better person than you want to be!” (1932).

WHAT DO THE WORDS “WHOLEBODY FOCUSING” MEAN TO ME?

When I say these words to myself, my attention shifts towards a sensory awareness of my whole body, often starting with a sense of my feet on the floor or some other parts of me where my body feels connected and supported by its environment. I give my body the time it needs to open up to itself: where it is, and how it is — how it is supported by the environment as I begin to feel more grounded and present to myself. At the same time, specific parts are coming forward for special attention. There seems to be a natural process between being well-grounded and how parts that need something come forward. I welcome these parts and invite them to be in my consciousness just the way they are with unconditional positive regard.

THERE ARE FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS IN A WHOLEBODY FOCUSING EXPERIENCE

These are actually skills for living a healthy life as much as the skills are for Focusing.

1. The ability to invite the body wisdom to awaken. This awakening is often experienced as spontaneous inner-directed movement of the body as a whole that seems to have a mind and purpose all of its own.
2. The ability to become aware of a whole body sense of your own Ground and Presence — the essence of you, separate from any issues or problems, as a preparation for being with something.
3. The ability to allow a bodily felt sense to emerge out of something that wants your attention in the context of your grounded presence — because now it feels safe enough to do so. The sense of the whole self as a container and the sense of something that wants attention is the place where the traditional Focusing step of ‘asking and receiving’ tends to happen.
4. The ability to hold both the sense of a grounded presence acting as a container and the felt sense of what wants attention with equal positive regard emphasizes the importance of each. It is not one or the other but both together that create the forward movement in our lives.

I want to stress that Wholebody Focusing is Focusing with emphasis on certain aspects of the Focusing experience that are already there in the original six steps. For example, Wholebody Focusing

- emphasizes grounded presence as the place from which we become consciously aware of what needs our attention.
- also makes room for inner-directed movement as a handle (something to hold on to) to move us from what is familiar and comfortable to what is new and hence unfamiliar and often uncomfortable.
- emphasizes the role of physical posture and how it affects the way we think and feel and respond to situations both familiar and unfamiliar.
- emphasizes the importance of grounded presence (that sense of me and more than me) as a safe container for the parts that needs our attention.
- finally, stresses the importance of holding both this quality of grounded presence and what needs attention with equal positive regard.

A WHOLEBODY FOCUSING EXPERIENCE

Where am I right now? I am at the YMCA doing my daily workout. I am sitting on a bike programmed to challenge me with varying degrees of intensities to burn about 500

calories an hour. I am already feeling grounded and present. I am giving my legs and feet the space they need to let go into a physical activity at the speed and effort they enjoy as a workout. I am sitting back, just going along for the ride. Sometimes the challenge increases, and I am tempted to dig in and try harder. This is the signal for me to sit back even more and allow the body to find its own way. When I do, the body as a whole becomes even more involved in the movement, and the challenge becomes almost effortless and quite enjoyable once again. This process is the Alexander technique aspect of Wholebody Focusing in action!

So I decide to go with where I am now. And once I make that choice what comes to mind — and is sensed once again in my body — is an issue I have been working on for some time. It is a childhood story that I still find painful and confusing. The first time I was with the story, I realized how this sense of confusion dramatically affects the way I respond to new situations. For example, if you ask me “How are you?” — just a simple question like this — my body will often freeze, my mind will go blank, and I will not know what to say. I will mumble something, but it won’t be connected at all with what I am feeling. Actually, what I am feeling is panic.

So how does this issue feel in my body right now in the context of me effortlessly riding this bike, and feeling grounded and present in the movement? I realize my eyes are wide, and then when I sense the story again they want to close. Now that the eyes are closed, I start to feel a deep sadness in my chest and some pain in my head and behind my eyes. It feels like I am going back to the original situation, but this time it feels like I am having a bad dream. I acknowledge both the felt sense of having something like a bad dream and the sense that I am also riding the bike and how grounding that feels.

Suddenly, the eyes open again. They don’t feel so alert nor are they seeing clearly. I can feel a kind of headachy pain at the edge of my forehead. I make room for *both* — both the felt sense of the pain in the head and the sense of myself in movement peddling a bike effortlessly with my legs and feet, enjoying the movement. All of a sudden I feel something awaken in my chest around the heart. It feels like a sense of opening and expanding. The whole upper chest moves upward. I am becoming more upright in my posture, and my head is realigning itself slightly. This feels good, which surprises me. It seems connected in some way to this painful feeling in my forehead! Again I hold both, and now I am holding the sense of my grounded presence and the sense of the pain in the forehead together with the opening of my chest and the righting of my posture. The pain in the forehead seems to be easing. I welcome all this.

Now I begin to feel a familiar chronic tension at the back of my neck, a crunching down feeling. I welcome this part to be there just the way it needs to be and invite it to take the room it needs to become even more. My shoulders come alive and begin to move, lifting my arms as they do so. The whole thing feels assertive, my shoulders and upper arms and hands moving with that kind of playful “don’t mess with me” kind of gesture. Once again I am surprised, sensing a connection between the neck pain, the head pain and now this wonderful assertive dance coming from my upper body, all supported by the powerful action in my lower body. I want to mark here the vital role that postural re-alignment and changes in muscle tone have played in the unfolding of this new self-awareness process.

I realize I could continue just being with this process for some time, noticing the connection between different parts of me as they relate to one another. It is like parts of me that are alive and feeling good are supporting parts of me that feel tight, painful, and squished down. All this is unfolding in the context of a grounding presence that is burning calories as we speak! I have the sense that just being with the whole situation is an opportunity for these painful parts to somehow begin to rethink their possibilities. My enjoyment of what I am doing, riding the bike so effortlessly, and my willingness to be with these other parts at the same time in a receptive and caring way seems to stimulate these parts to more fully realize themselves in some kind of healing that doesn't need to explain itself.

This is what Wholebody Focusing is all about. My eyes are open now, and I am seeing clearly with alert eyes, a little differently than before. My eyes seem to feel more supported from the whole of me in their task of noticing what is out there. I also feel good about myself, more assertive. As I go back to the original issue, I realize the whole thing is connected. It is like parts of me are finding their way back to their rightful way of being in me.

WHOLEBODY FOCUSING AND FOCUSING

What does Focusing with the whole body add or change in a Focusing process? What did I do differently from the traditional six steps of Focusing? How has my experience of the Alexander technique helped me in this pursuit?

There are two significant contributions the Alexander technique brings to the Focusing experience. One is the introduction of inner directed movement as a handle that seems to dramatically affect what wants to unfold and how. The second is the role of posture and how changes of posture, body realignment and muscle tone not only affect the way we think and feel about a situation, but also play a very important role in giving grounded support to new emotions and cognitive insights. Further, parts of the Focusing process are developed more explicitly in Wholebody Focusing. For example, the role of grounded presence is expanded. There is a direct relationship between grounded presence as safe container and the issue that wants to be held in my awareness. The more I feel grounded in the body as a whole, supported by the environment, the easier and safer it is for me to be with something that needs attention. Inner directed movement enables a Focuser to feel comfortable staying with a pre-verbal process that feels just right prior to the need for words that bring another level of meaning and understanding.

BACK TO THE DIRECT WHOLEBODY FOCUSING EXPERIENCE — THAT PAINFUL SENSE OF CONFUSION. WHAT HAPPENED?

At the same time as a felt sense emerged regarding the pain of confusion, I sensed a grounding presence acting as a safe container for this chronic experience of freezing with a sense of confusion. Notice what I did.

- Inner directed movement was welcomed, a kind of hand holding to engage my attention as my body moved me towards a whole new experience of myself.

- I wanted to maintain that sense of the whole body alive in movement, and at the same time be with something that needed my attention. There seemed to be a natural flow back and forth between both as needed to maintain a safe distance at the edge.
- If for some reason I found that I couldn't be with something with unconditional positive regard, I knew I could invite 'something in me' to be with this part in a way I know I can't!
- There was always a sense of whole body involvement in whatever unfolded, and it seemed to create a safe space for parts of me to come alive and begin to heal and or connect with other parts of me where words or searching for meaning did not seem to have a place at this stage of the process. For example, there was something very safe and containing as my feet, legs, and buttocks were busily enjoying the movement. This action seemed to free up the upper part of me to notice what else was happening. I could feel strong support and powerful life energy flowing upwards from the lower trunk.
- This feeling of being physically supported seemed to make it easier for me to just be with what was unfolding in these other parts of my body that were both painful and alive at the same time. I noticed that as my body became more aligned, more of the painful connections surfaced which seemed to demand further realignment and support from the muscular structure itself.

WHOLEBODY FOCUSING HAS ENHANCED THE QUALITY OF MY EVERYDAY LIVING IN DIFFERENT WAYS:

- I learned how to transition between doing and non-doing without losing the benefits of both.
- Spiritually, I know from my bodily sensing that I am not only part of a much larger reality that is essentially life affirming, but also I am able to engage with this larger reality to support my personal journey in life.
- I learned to accept what it is that feels uncomfortable or incomplete in me as natural and essential to becoming whole and that it has the energy and the wisdom within it needed to move my life forward.
- I notice that the more I can stand grounded in my own sense of self, the more open and receptive I am to others and able to seeing our differences as potentially of mutual benefit to both of our lives.

Part II

INTEGRATING WHOLEBODY FOCUSING IN FOCUSING-ORIENTED THERAPY

Motility is of special significance for the path of self-realization, for it involves the body *in its wholeness*. (Levin, 1985, p. 93)

INTRODUCTION

In this part of the article, I (Glenn) will be presenting how I have integrated Wholebody Focusing (WBF) into Focusing-oriented therapy (FOT). Working with the whole body expands Focusing and significantly transforms therapy. I will explore how WBF is already embedded in Gendlin's philosophy and theory of change, especially his concept of *bodily implying*, i.e. how inwardly arising movement is often the body's lead to next steps and direction of solution. In addition, some examples will show how physical movement generates new energy and positive space toward solution, transforming stuck patterns occasioned by chronic or acute trauma.

WHOLEBODY PROCESS IN FOCUSING AND FOT

I have discovered that WBF, as Kevin has presented in the previous section (also detailed in a recent manual by Van der Kooy and McEvenue, 2006), provides a pathway for the body to participate directly, creatively, and more fully in Focusing and therapy. Most of the practice of Focusing has been sedentary, sitting with eyes closed, and attending to the body as felt from inside (usually the viscera). We can call Focusing in this way as a process of the *outside moving inward* — bringing attention to the center of the body to allow for inward felt awareness (felt sense) of some issue or situation. This procedure of “chair-bound” Focusing relies primarily on *interoception* (Afford, 2008) i.e. capacity for being sensitive and receptive to stimuli and sensations that originate from inside the body. I would maintain, however, that this interoceptive quality of felt-sensing is only one way that we get meaningful information from the body.

When we include Focusing with our whole body, additional sensory processes are activated, notably *proprioception*, i.e. sense of posture, position, musculature and relation of parts of the body with each other and *kinaesthesia*, i.e. the feel or sense of movement of body position, the body and limbs (Afford, 2008). WBF can thus be described as a process of the *inside moving outward*, i.e. letting our body-sense move, do or show something of its own accord, in whatever ways that it feels or needs. This brings into play proprioceptive and kinesthetic senses, especially expanded felt awareness of areas of physical tension, posture and movement.

I believe that it is the interweaving of both of these aspects of Focusing that are crucial for a more full bodied and deeper change process in FOT. The felt sense is not only or primarily expressed in words or images, but as Gendlin (1981, p. 35) once asserted, “More powerful than letting words come from a felt sense may be letting body movement come”

(Wiltschko, 1996). When we stand (or even sitting with more encouragement), the body sense is allowed to move and express itself in various ways, independent of our conscious control or deliberate effort. What often comes is the body's right next step and life-forward direction toward solution and healing, in the context of Grounded Presence of the whole body as a safe container and strong base to hold and be with what comes.

DEVELOPING A WHOLEBODY FOCUSING-ORIENTED THERAPY

Here I want to share some of my experiences incorporating WBF into the therapy process. I have explicated some of the key aspects of the process with brief examples from sessions.

1. Standing

As I was learning WBF from Kevin, I began to experience very deep and profound changes in my own Focusing process and sensed that this could be of tremendous value to my clients. So I started to suggest that there is this other way of working that involves standing, grounding, and letting the body move, express, feel, etc. The results thus far have been very positive and encouraging as a way of working. It has opened a wider range of possibilities, including a stronger physical connection with the body, activation of spontaneous movement, and greater access to sensory, proprioceptive and kinesthetic information from the body. I have had clients report an immediate difference in their relationship with their body and a new physical quality of experiencing when they stand. There is a flow to the session as the body is free to do whatever it needs. Clients notice more energy, aliveness, along with a deepened connection with their whole body and feelings. One client almost immediately noticed a "distinct difference" when standing, reporting how he experienced more awareness of his physical being and a sense of wholeness he had not recognized before. Another client began to realize how much her body liked to move and how it felt more freeing to stand. Clients often enjoy standing, as it feels enlivening and enables them to follow what their body is doing and showing them.

2. Physical Grounding/Embodied Presence

I spend a lot of time guiding clients into physical awareness, inviting them to feel their feet (legs/ arms/ back, etc.) as ways of feeling more connected to and grounded in their whole body. Holding and maintaining an accepting awareness (Presence) is also crucial in forming a solid, strong frame, and safe container for their body process to unfold. In WBF, *Presence* is embodied as a physically felt experience as well as an awareness that holds and contains what comes from within. There is a back and forth between the containment of one's Grounded Presence and whatever begins to emerge from the body's deeper order and felt sensing.

What clients report (and I have experienced, as well) is that Grounding and Wholebody Presence generate a more expansive space for their body process to open up and

express itself in whatever ways it needs. When clients are experiencing very difficult places (core wounds, traumas, high anxiety, tender/vulnerable parts, etc.), there is careful attention and active encouragement to sense their grounding and present sense of embodied living in this moment.

One client describes his Embodied Presence as being his “tree” and the places that need attention or emerge are living inside his big, strong tree. Another client began to feel very solid in his “trunk”, which he said gave him a firm “platform” he had not experienced before. This has allowed him to feel more willing to invite painful places to open up in our sessions. A woman who has had numerous physical ailments and difficulty walking has been able to stand for longer periods of time. She now reports experiencing a renewed sense of strength in her body and in her sense of self-support, enabling her to be more assertive.

3. Unfolding of the whole body-process in therapy sessions

As clients become more comfortable standing, they begin to trust more in their body’s own process. Sometimes clients have some specific issue, situation or pattern they want to explore or find ways to change. As therapy proceeds, clients often become more open to inviting whatever wants to come in their space, trusting more in their own body’s wisdom to show whatever is important for them to feel, do, or experience. Clients notice movements and swaying, experience physical sensations, expressions and energy in peripheral parts of the body. They may receive information and meaning from listening to what their body is feeling and doing. There is a sense in which parts of the body and places in the self are being allowed to unwind and express themselves in whatever ways *they need*, without conscious control or deliberation. Many channels, including sound, postures, sensory awareness, behavioral qualities, role play, gestures, etc. are opened, providing expanded avenues for change, healing, realizations, release. At times, we touch on embodied patterns (that seem to want to control, fix, engineer, or avoid), which are also accepted for their reasons for being present.

4. Role of therapist in Wholebody Focusing-oriented therapy

In FOT, the therapist-client interaction and relationship is primary. Wholebody FOT retains the same qualities of acceptance, empathic listening, sensitive being-with, and relational connection. I also foster the Inner Relationship (Cornell and McGavin, p. 21) between Wholebody Presence and any place or part that emerges. There are some important differences and additions when working in a standing, body-oriented way. Since I am also standing with clients, my body is in motion and in a more interactive space than sitting. Mostly, I reflect back what I am observing and sensing from the client’s process. In addition, I incorporate listening from my whole body, sharing realizations that emerge into my awareness from my own body movements or some inner somatic resonance. Listening from the whole body requires that I stay in my own Grounded Presence, while maintaining an embodied connection with the client. It also involves an open attitude of “not-knowing” what will come next, trusting in the body process to unfold.

I strive to hold a safe space for whatever is emergent in the client's body process, without stopping to have the client put things into words. This seems to allow an expanded sense of freedom and flow for the inner-directed process to open outward and unfold. This is a very important part of the Focusing process, that we don't just find what is already there, but are interacting with what is implicit in our experiencing so that something is allowed to form. In WBF sessions, this process of forming often happens at a physical, nonverbal level as we permit and directly experience incipient signs of energy-into-movement.

The other important function of the therapist is to notice and mark any sign of a body release — such as change of breathing pattern, different type of motion, shift in posture, facial expression, sense of something easing, releasing, or a new quality of energy. These shifts, however slight, are the signal of a possible change-step in FOT, something which has occurred that is a new possibility, a new way of being-with something that is just right for what the organism needs, right now. So I often say, “Ahh, there was a bigger breath, looks like your chest expanded. Maybe something happened just then.” Clients are invited to spend time nurturing these body shifts, while also being encouraged to give explicit permission to whatever new way their body is showing.

INNER-DIRECTED MOVEMENT AS BODILY IMPLYING OF NEXT STEPS

Gendlin has stated in many places that “Every living body implies the next step of its life-process” (1993, p. 31). The notion of bodily-implicating (knowing; indicating; sensing...) of next steps in a life-forward direction (1996) is crucial in recognizing and facilitating change-steps in therapy. If our body-sense both *is* and *implies-forward* (Gendlin, 2007), inviting the body to do or show something without conscious control or deliberation often brings forward just what is needed for carrying forward our living. Meaning is not something static, but involves the whole body's intending and striving toward carrying forward next steps of living. As Gendlin (1992) states,

With a broad bodily process (including its muscles, nerves, glands, and circulation) the body *implies* its continuation, and thereby also the objects, things, or words, involved in this step. When these objects occur, they *mean* how they carry body-life forward (p. 39).

By starting from the inside moving outward, expressive body movement, such as spontaneously arising gesturing motions can be implicit leads toward solutions and positive change (Fleisch, 2008), instances in which the body “moves of its own accord; it makes its own steps...” (Gendlin, 1978, p. 325), and this is the essence of therapeutic change and growth. “It feels like the body doing what it needs and wants to do” (1978, p. 328). The body changes “*in the direction in which it needs to change*” (1978, p. 335). “The body will *move itself, and shift itself* into how it is as problem solved, if we let it.” (1978, p. 339, italics added)

Starting several years ago, I began to observe how gestures (what I called *gestural leads*) can function as one form of bodily implicating of next steps (Fleisch, 2000, 2008). This

phenomenon of spontaneous movement portending the body's next step or direction of solution occurs so frequently that it is a regular component of my work in FOT. When observed, these movements are harbingers of the body's next steps, life energy coming alive, starting to move the body in a life forward direction.

WBF invites and allows the body expanded avenues for moving toward its own healing. As I will demonstrate, these body movements are instances where "*the body first solves the problem so that the body is as the solution requires*" (Gendlin, 1978, p. 339). Note how the body, when allowed to move of its inner wisdom, aligns the organism into a space where the problem has already changed and a solution path is opened. Bringing Focusing attention to the moving process allows for a more explicit felt awareness and active permission for the implicit change to keep happening.

1) Postural shifts

In this section I will present two examples of how changes in posture are one way the body implies a new way of being or changed sense of self in the context of trauma.

Example #1: A male client in his 50's (whom I have worked with for several years) came to therapy following severe panic attacks. What later emerged is that he experienced prolonged emotional abuse and humiliation for years as a child, partly in relation to being very overweight. I introduced standing work and surprisingly he liked what he called "physical Focusing". In one session while standing, we observed how his posture tended to slump over, with his neck and head bent downward. He paused and attended to the posture, and while so doing, **his head began to move slowly upward, from this downward position to straightening itself out.** The movement of his head and posture continued silently for a few minutes, during which time he was aware that it seemed to be happening on its own. He was encouraged to (and did) pause at the end of each movement to sense into the change in his whole body posture. What came to him was that the downward look was the embodied posture from childhood — holding a lifetime of shame and a familiar sense of feeling small, inferior, inadequate. When his head moved upward, his posture straightened and his eyes were looking forward. This new posture felt like a fresh emerging sense of feeling equal — as good as anyone. When he allowed this awareness to ground in his whole body, he reported a sense of feeling more empowered, as if coming out of hiding into the world as an adult. What a major change from such a slight shift in posture! This new way of *being* that the posture is showing him (although still uncomfortable) has opened up a whole new way of sensing himself.

Example #2: A female client has a history of traumatic physical abuse and neglect along with chronic physical problems that have impaired her ability to walk and function. In a recent session, she was sensing how her body often feels trapped (with recurrent memories of being locked in a closet as a child), and how she is aware that she avoids enclosed spaces. While describing these recollections, her upper body had begun to lean backward, as if being pushed back or feeling cornered. She became aware that this is a familiar position where her body starts leaning against a surface for support as it feels more pressed, trapped and cornered with a helpless, panicky sense of doom. Suddenly, **her arms moved into a**

“fighter’s stance” and aggressively pushed out, and her whole posture shifted to a more upright position, with her upper body leaning forward. When invited to Focus on this shift of posture, her whole demeanor transformed. She felt a renewed energy, her face brightened. She said, “This is showing me I still can stand up tall, that my fighting spirit is here and won’t let anyone dominate me again!... I can stand up for myself.” She also noticed that her neck area loosened, her shoulders felt freer to move and her chest expanded, giving her more room to breathe. The next day she called to say that her body carried an “undefined positive energy” that “kept me a little steadier” for a good part of the day.

2) Physical movement

These instances show how movement in any part of the body, however slight, may be the body’s implying of positive development, new energy and next steps in (literally) moving in a life-forward direction, especially where the life-forward process had been stopped.

Example #3: A young man came to therapy in a state of severe depression and confusion with a great deal of self-doubt and negative self-image. He had failed college and felt unable to get his life back on track, feeling very traumatized by believing he had ruined his whole life. He reported having withdrawn into a shell, hiding out from the world. This client liked the standing work, finding that it enabled him to connect more easily with his body and feelings. Over time, while standing, he began to feel more “attached” to his body and himself. This stronger sense of embodied connection has been a powerful foundation for what else has emerged. While standing, with his arms at his side, I observed that **the fingers on both his hands were wiggling quite rapidly.** I invited him to notice what his fingers were doing, suggesting that they might be expressing something important. He was silent for a few minutes (while the fingers continued to wiggle) then said, “It feels like they are antsy, sort of like a restless energy in me that is ready to get going.” I reflected his words back and encouraged him to stay attentive to the hands and fingers and what they were expressing. “Yeah [sigh], feels really good, like I haven’t felt this ‘get-going’ energy in a long time. I used to feel this all the time, and it seems to have gone away. It is great that it is here...” and as he stayed connected with his body sense, we noticed how this energy was permeating through his whole body.

Example #4: A woman had a traumatic history of being exposed to physical violence and threats by her brother. As a result, her body learned to withdraw into states of sleep, low energy and hibernation (like crawling into a shell), whenever faced with any anger, aggression or interpersonal conflict. She was going to stop therapy because all of our years of therapy made no lasting change in this physical reaction pattern. I suggested that we try standing, which she liked, and immediately noticed a difference. She stated that she enjoyed moving and walking, often feeling more alive and active. In one session, **her shoulders started to wriggle very strongly along with pronounced writhing motions in her upper back.** When invited to give consent to continue, the wriggling movements soon expanded into her whole body. As the session unfolded, what came was a sense that the wriggling movements felt like her body was coming out of a tight fitting diver’s wet suit so tightly wrapped around her that it had been constricting her movements and depleting her energy. (At another session, it felt like she was a snake that was shedding old skin.) In subsequent

sessions, the wriggling movement of her shoulders and upper back has continued to occur, along with a growing sense of grounding in her body, resulting in a powerful sense of loosening and feeling more empowered. In a recent session she noticed how her upper body felt flexible and loose while her lower body felt solid — a sense of ‘flexible strength,’ not rubbery or weak, but strong and loose. This direct experience of a whole new way of being has helped decrease the sleep/withdrawal pattern, allowing a more vulnerable, traumatized place to emerge, as evidenced by the experiencing in a recent session of physical sensations of being held down, hair pulled, and throat constricted, as if being choked.

CONCLUSION:

Moving outward — how the whole body process activates changes in FOT

Gendlin (1996) has stated that “The body also provides an avenue of therapy” (p. 181). “Bringing *the body* into the therapy process can be quite vital... Much more therapeutic change can happen if the body participates.” (p. 279). Certainly this is true, yet the main practice of Focusing and therapy seems to leave the body out of the process, or limits the body to our inward feelings and sensations (Wiltschko, 1996, p. 65). This is due I believe to the fact that most of the practice of FOT has been sedentary, with the body in a passive, quiet, meditative state. Incorporating the whole body in Focusing and into therapy activates a different type of process, which Kevin so aptly described as “the body awakening from inside, moving with a sensibility and intentionality of its own.” WBF as a process of *moving outward* allows for the felt sense to not only be experienced but also at the same time to activate the felt sense as a physical impulse or urge that can be expressed via motility. FOT needs to involve the interweaving of both the quiet moving inward with the active moving outward for a more full bodied and deeper Focusing-oriented change process. When the body is dynamically alive and energized, then the organism’s inherent sense of solutions is activated, providing *implicit bodily leads* that can move us forward, at times without cognitive understanding (i.e. not knowing) and without effort (i.e. not doing).

Gendlin (1996) has made this observation when he stated, “Every focusing step is of course a bodily change, but we often notice that enough of the whole body has as yet participated in the change” (p.185). He goes on to observe that “It is not inevitable that a new physical energy will come from simply Focusing. Having a felt sense is a quiet process” (p. 185). So when there is a change step from Focusing, when a new way of being has emerged, “we often see that the client’s body has remained in that quiet, receptive mode that is typical when a person attends to a felt sense. In that posture the body cannot yet be filled with the new way of being...” (p. 185).

Gendlin (1991) has stated that,

“If therapy deals only with inward data, whether emotion or felt sense, it misses a crucial dimension of the process of change. Therapy must involve more than Focusing on inner data in reflective inner space. There also needs to be a movement outward, into inter-action. Focusing as such does not sufficiently provide the moving out (Gendlin, p. 266).

In inner and outward modes, the content can seem to be the same, but the whole manner of being alive is different. To change in a major way, both are necessary. To add this to focusing, I advise, not specifically catharsis, but any of the modes of therapy that move outward. Moving out, rolling out, is an essential dimension of therapeutic change that is not provided by inward process dealing only with inner data” (Gendlin, 1991, p. 266-7).

When Gendlin states that Focusing as such does not provide sufficient moving outward, he is referring I believe to ‘chair-bound’ Focusing. However, starting from a standing position does tend to evoke this more active moving outward, as a natural expression of the person’s embodied feeling process. By bringing posture and physical movement more directly into Focusing, proprioceptive awareness of posture and body alignment and kinesthetic sense of movement are activated, both of which have important life meanings implicit in them. Additionally, as I hope the examples I presented show, the whole body needs to be involved in the transforming and healing of trauma, especially when clients have been stuck in structure-bound embodied patterns of responding such as the freeze reaction. We could observe instances in which the body of its own accord actually began to energize and move, activating the body’s living process in places where it had been immobile, frozen and blocked.

Gendlin points to a more whole body process in the formation of the direct referent points in the Process Model (stage VIII), something that Kevin has developed more intuitively in WBF. Gendlin describes this stage of Focusing as an interaction between a new sense of Self in a new environment (bodily sentience of the whole), and letting this new feel come forward and move of its own accord. From connecting with the body’s “*whole body’s implicit richness* of situations and interactions, all changed at once in this particular focal implying now... the right postures and movements will come” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 221). Gendlin describes this step as that of *letting come*. “In letting it come, I allow my body-feel to stir, to move, to do whatever it does *independently of my deliberate control...*” (1997, p. 230, italics added).

Thus, this new (whole body) sequence activates and incorporates the body’s implicit richness and inward sense of rightness. When Gendlin (1996) states that the “organism can fill *itself* in...” that “*it* knows how to heal” (p. 282) he is offering a very profound model of how healing happens in Focusing and therapy. What he is inferring is the notion that our living organism is born with an inherent blueprint, an inner sense and knowing of how it should be, and how the environment should interact with it. From this perspective we can understand what Gendlin means by bodily implying of right next steps. Our body knows what should have happened and what needs to happen and will imply its next bit of life process to move forward in this pre-figured right direction. When we allow the body room to do so, it will often generate something that is needed to carry forward our living process in many creative, intricate, novel ways.

Kevin developed WBF as a way to allow for movement and posture to be integral aspects of the Focusing experience. I have attempted to show how Wholebody Focusing can be integrated into FOT, especially where clients are responsive to this way of being in ses-

sions. In addition, a more full body experience can be essential in helping to transform stuck patterns and structure bound states by first, allowing clients to experience a more embodied, grounded Presence in the Now, so that they sense their own wholeness and body as a safe, secure, and strong container. Clients gain an awareness of how parts of them actually function, how tensions are held and places feel stuck. Within this context of accepting awareness, something begins to stir and moves the body from within, as if something long stuck and frozen now feels safe to awaken and come outward. It is the integration or holding of both the whole sense of Grounded Self simultaneously with any places or parts that emerge that is the key to the healing of trauma and carrying forward of bodily living in new, fuller, and freer pathways. The challenge for both therapist and client is to stay in Presence and follow the body's lead, trusting that the organism will show and do what is implied as next, moving in the right direction. The body moves toward its own healing.

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TYING THE THREAD OF BODYWORK, MOVEMENT AND FOCUSING

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INTRODUCTION

A small and diverse — yet increasingly definitive — sector of the Focusing community has been working together since 2004 to explore how Focusing as a process and a range of body-oriented modalities are influencing and enriching one another. The work has recognized the interrelatedness of all bodily modes of expression and has, therefore, welcomed and encouraged the evolution of multifaceted approaches, with body-logic and Focusing as the two common elements operating at a common edge. The principal modalities investigated to date include manual therapies/touch, movement, sound, yoga and somatics. The list is expanding as more body-centered individuals, including practitioners, become attracted to Focusing, and continue to engage in crossing of these modalities.

This paper gives an overview of the relationships that are being forged between Focusing and body-centered practices. It discusses and gives practical examples of the synergies that can emerge. In so doing, it attempts to offer a credible rationale for pursuing these relationships more deeply, from both an academic and experiential standpoint.

In the text that follows, the terms ‘Practitioner’ and ‘Client’ are used when referring to professional consultations, and the terms ‘Focuser’ and ‘Listener’, or ‘Listening Partner’, or ‘Companion’, or ‘Touch-Listener’ are used variously when referring to peer-exchanges in dyads or triads. These latter variations have no differential significance beyond the obvious, relating largely to particular descriptive forms favored by different teachers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NON-INTRUSIVE BODYWORK

In the prevailing bodywork paradigm, when a client receives a massage or any form of hands-on therapy, the practitioner has been trained to have an agenda as a ‘fixer’. The body is generally seen as the source of the pathology that needs fixing. The emphasis on fixing often leads to seeing the body as a mechanism that requires deep, hard, and intrusive approaches. In this mechanistic paradigm the body is not recognized as a resource that can reveal unconscious needs or implicit remedies. Non-intrusive approaches, however, do not view the body mechanistically, but rather, recognize that bodies and minds are continuously communicating sensations and feelings. In non-intrusive approaches we attend to these communications. The body then freely reveals its own implicit remedies, unconditioned by negative life experiences and mental formations. By learning to feel and listen to the body’s communications, the client can learn how to begin to self-heal, regardless of whether he or she is very ill or merely having a bad day.

BACKGROUND

Focusing was originally developed during an era of deepening understanding of how mental states can affect physiological function. Focusing as a practice offers the experience of a unique relationship between body-process and thinking process. Eugene Gendlin (Focusing, 1981) pointed out how a bodily felt-sense is at the foundation of thinking and feeling — and at the same time more intricate. Bodily communications are always in the present moment. By listening directly to the body, practitioners and clients can receive raw data uncensored by pre-conditioned thought processes. When practitioners and clients attend to the kinds of feelings and senses the body is communicating, they become present to an inner state of observing and reporting that does not censor or judge. Gendlin and his protégés discovered ways to process those observations and reportings. Focusers are learning how to apply those processes in combination with other kinds of somatic observations and data, e.g. tactile, kinesthetic, proprioceptive, tonal, and postural.

AN ‘EMERGING INTRINSIC’ HYPOTHESIS

When a practitioner learns to elicit the client’s *felt sense* or somatic experiencing, a healing or reorganizing principle seems to emerge from within the client’s body. This reorganizing principle is intrinsic to the body and mind and becomes available in whatever way is most conducive to repair. Thus, something innately restorative emerges from within the client’s body-mind experiencing. These bodily changes can be monitored by practitioners through their hands and other sensory impressions. Correspondingly, the practitioner as *witnessing-companion* may also experience a sense of freshness, surprise, or insight — a sort of somatic resonance with the client, a kind of sharing of this reorganizing principle.

Indeed, this witnessing-companionship may itself be the deepest reorganizing principle. In this space the client can discover that his/her experience is being met. The experience of being met is primal. It touches and resonates. It sets up an expectancy about formerly unshareable experiences. It opens that experience to the daylight and the oxygen of understanding, possibility, and hope. In much of the exploratory work described later in this article, the *practitioner/client* concept becomes transformed to *Focuser/witnessing companion*.

GESTATION OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

A group of around fourteen Focusers, from five countries, five different cultures, speaking six different languages, and trained in a wide range of body-working and movement modalities, struck an affinity at the International Focusing Conference in Costa Rica in 2004, having formed an interest group at the invitation of Robert Lee, the IFC organizer. As they Focused together and shared their bodywork experiences, there quickly developed a common desire to explore the Focusing paradigm in their respective fields, and vice versa. The modalities represented have since expanded to embrace other somatic techniques that work with clients’ body-centered awareness; examples include dance, ‘presencing’, toning, body mapping, yoga, shiatsu, body-centered psychotherapy and medicine, as well as a variety of new approaches that combine Focusing and bodywork together.

The increasing ties between bodywork, movement, and Focusing were finally and irrevocably threaded together in 2007 at a unique three-day experiential event on the Italian island of Ischia, attended by forty-seven participants from Europe and the Americas. A full report on the event, titled Meeting at the Edge (MAE), is accessible via the Focusing Institute website home page or by going direct to www.focusing.org/bodywork/maereport.htm

DEVELOPING APPLICATIONS

Here in summary are some key points from explorations that were carried out at MAE 2007, and which are now stimulating further studies and a widening of the field of applications. The full list of modalities informing the work of participants is in the report cited above.

Program of Creativity and Collaboration

It might seem strange to treat the program as an exploration of itself. However, the core-planning group decided from the outset to develop a process-structure that would typify an overall best Focusing approach. We held the intention of creating conditions that would bring both safety and ‘more than’ — to whatever modalities were offered at the event — by individuals whose degree of Focusing experience (if any) was somewhat unknown to the organizers. Three preceding years of monthly conference calls and two intervening Focusing Internationals provided the necessary degree of confidence that this idea of a *Process-Structure* could work. We created a working definition of a *Process-Structure* to serve as a framework, helping to build interactions and direct attention to ways of generating and processing information. Like Focusing itself, *the emphasis here is not on content but on process*. Despite its previous successes, the core team of seven organizers (co-contributors to this paper) experienced frazzled nerves immediately prior to the opening of the event. What a relief we felt immediately after the whole gathering did a check-in, and the process of collective improvisation started to gestate!

Most of the work during the event evolved in small organic groups, with a substantial degree of interchange and movement between groups and a general sharing of experience at the end. The following paragraphs describe (sometimes in depth and at other times in outline) the ideas and experiences forthcoming from the groups that have reported on their work.

Bodywork and Focusing

Various bodywork modalities and their guiding principles were demonstrated, exploring how the practitioners applied the principles of Focusing in their different modalities. This group was also valuable because it is very rare for such cross-disciplinary sharing to occur between the various bodywork modalities, which in some instances are competitive with one another.

Case Studies: No systematic research of case reports is yet in place. Here, however, are two abridged cases reported from core group members.

1. Fifty-five-year-old male, professional writer, suffering from advanced case of shingles, excruciating pain, deep red discoloration on left chest and arm tissue — along nipple line, movement of left arm greatly restricted by pain and muscle spasms: No physical contact is acceptable — even self-touch; analgesics do not work. Client depressed, 3 month writing hiatus, catastrophizing about poor recovery prognosis by MD. Bodywork practitioner decides to use Focusing to help the client process what is occurring in affected body parts, in hope of at least giving the client a reprieve from the vicious cycles of suffering that seemed to be made worse by his ruminations. Practitioner uses touch in unaffected body parts to monitor client's physical changes. Following the steps of Focusing, in combination with various non-intrusive bodywork applications, the client was able to adjust to being in direct inner contact with the intensity of the pain.

Practitioner: *Please bring your awareness into the painful parts of your body...and perhaps see if there are some words... that describe the kind of pain that you are feeling.*

William: *It feels like a hot searing pain... as if I am being stuck with needles... my shoulder and arm feel like they are in a hot cast... I am seeing something like a pool of hot lava.*

[Practitioner reflects client's words and asks the client to notice anything else that is emerging from the area.]

William: *The pain is the shape of a long cylinder.*

Practitioner: *As you feel into that cylinder, notice where the burning is the most intense... And maybe see... if there are some words that describe...*

[The Practitioner is supporting client's head and neck.]

William: *The burning is white hot... It is about the size of a quarter.*

Practitioner: *As you are feeling into the hottest part, notice what is occurring in the rest of your body...*

William: *It's strange... but I feel my whole body relaxing... At first I heard: 'Don't go there' but as I am reporting the pain, I am feeling something like: 'It's OK.'*

[Practitioner reflects client's words.]

William: *The pool of hot lava is starting to become cooler... not so bright.*

Practitioner: *You're noticing some cooling and not so bright...*

William: *It is still cooling... now I see a cool pond of water... I feel no pain... the moon is reflected in the water... it is very beautiful.*

Practitioner: *Now you're not feeling pain... I feel warmth and softening under my hands... is it OK if I put my hands on the parts where you were feeling pain and stiffness?*

William: *Yes.*

Practitioner: *Feel into the places under my hands and notice what comes...*

William: *I feel a very pleasant warmth... (he takes deep breath)... a deep sense of relief.*

Practitioner: [initiates movement on client's shoulder...] *Notice where you feel this movement...*

William: *I feel very easy... my arm feels totally free.*

As things proceeded, the client was able to feel more and more different kinds of sensations in the affected region. As this was occurring, the practitioner could feel changes in his own bodily and mental state moving from a 'fearful sympathetic' state to a 'relaxed parasympathetic' state. The client was monitoring felt experiences including bodily sensations, feeling states that brought up memories, images, and insights that seemed to synthesize all of those phenomena — including a shift in images that duplicated a shift to parasympathetic body responses.

Just before William reported the pool of water and moon reflection, the Practitioner observed 'parasympathetic shift'... the client's body warming and softening, client taking deep breaths, and relaxation of facial muscles. As the last of these image shifts took place, the client experienced a palpable (to him and to the practitioner) Felt-Shift. When client and practitioner observed the skin surface of the affected area, the bright red coloration had faded to light pink. The client was now able to touch the area freely with no pain and move his left arm and shoulder in all directions. Practitioner and client continued to work together for a few years. There was never a return of the symptoms. The client, who had been a meditator for years, started incorporating the Focusing elements of this session into his daily practice. (Reported by Jack Blackburn.)

2. Thirty-one-year-old man who suffers from multiple sclerosis and is tetraplegic. Practitioner initially gave him Esalen massage alone — in the lateral (sideways) position, in which he did not become as disturbed when a spasm came on during the session. Practitioner then received client's permission to try something new by integrating Focusing into the massage and began to combine Focusing and touch in every session:

Practitioner: *Please feel into the region where you can sense my hands touching and holding still. Maybe you can feel my hand being warm, the slight pressure that comes through my touch, imagining it is like you can slip inside your body and travel to that meeting spot... and then... maybe say how it is there... any sensations... temperature, tension or looseness... Can you feel a 'quality' and perhaps describe it, or maybe just say what comes...?*

We could then go to the blockages in his body, asking what, or how, he is feeling there and what are the sensations there, and we began through touch to listen together to his body:

Client: *Ah, it is hot and kind of "burning".*

Practitioner: [after acknowledging client's words] *If I remove my hands slightly... see where it feels good for you... and where else you want me to put my hands now... so we can listen to what is changing?*

We followed through all of the Focusing steps, and whatever movements or words came from him, I reflected back through touch and words. The felt sense and felt shifts were clear, and he made significant progress. His physical abilities improved and he now feels more acceptance towards his life in general. He is listening more to his 'body wisdom' now and wants to learn Focusing to cope better with the challenges that come through his illness. (Reported by Claudia Conza.)

Movement and Focusing

In our exploration of bringing movement to the Focusing process, we have begun to distinguish three kinds of relationship between moving and felt sensing.

1. A way of moving that prepares us for the Focusing process and facilitates the formation of felt-senses: Gentle movements that facilitate simple patterns of activation and release, fully embodied breath, extension and contractions, activation of fluids and connection to gravity, create a sense of embodied safety and relaxed connection to one's own whole being. This awakened and relaxed presence to one's own body-person — a fully embodied sense of self — supports the sense of inner safety that is necessary for the beginning of the Focusing process and the formation of felt-senses. We have found that placing this emphasis on inner safety and connection through movement is particularly helpful to new Focusers.

Engaging with inner-directed movement before entering into the Focusing process provides a 'rooting' into one's own body that can be re-engaged at a time of approaching emotional overwhelm/flooding. For example, when the need for safety and presence arise during a session, the Focuser will be able to re-invigorate her or his connection to the ground and gravity, to turn to her/his breathing to sense the flow of air from and into the larger whole, or to engage in tactile explorations that can help in recovering a sense of boundaries. The warm-up process before a Focusing session provides the opportunity to experience one's own body as a 'subjective physicality'. Exploring an inner directed way of moving offers a quite different experience from an anatomically functional way of moving and sensing the body-self. Instead of relying only on following an internal anatomical map or on movement sequences patterned from every-day activities or physical practices that one normally engages in, the mover is able to listen to his/her internal environment directly and to respond to inner stirrings. The mover is encouraged to respond outside of the framework of functional relations that govern moving in the everyday context.

This process facilitates the connection between the 'organic' and the 'symbolic', a connection that is at the very root of felt-sense formation. This kind of kinetic preparation for a peer-exchange also aids the role of the Companion (which would be equally applicable to the Practitioner in a client consultation) since it provides the foundation for cultivating a state of 'somatic resonance'. In this state, the Companion allows her/his corporeal field to act both as a stabilizer and as a resonator of the Focuser's somatic, sub-verbal states.

Somatic resonance refers to the capacity of the Companion to be grounded in her/his own body in a positively neutral state, while tracking the sub-verbal responses of the Focuser. This ability is cultivated with training, experience and intention. The Companion needs to

be able to establish for him or herself an unobstructed breathing pattern and a relaxed tissue tone, and to gently hold an open, allowing receptivity to what is arising in the Focuser. The Companion is alert to subtle changes in the body-field of the Focuser, tracking for example the breath (shallow or full, quick or slow, controlled or relaxed), tissue tone (perceived levels of contraction, density, flexibility and texture), patterns of initiation, range of motion, full body postures, gestures and facial expressions, movement of the eyes (often detectable even when closed). The Companion may briefly match the Focuser's somatic states, yet continually returns to a positively neutral state throughout the session and in that way acts as a stabilizer for the Focuser's somatic process.

2. Movement that is an initial handle for a felt sense: Opening the range of symbolization to kinetic expression can be very helpful for the Focuser's process because movement often comes before words and can facilitate keeping company with states that are by their very nature pre-verbal. Moving becomes a way of meeting a felt-sense and letting it blossom into a fully embodied state, facilitating an organic carrying forward that may not be discovered otherwise.

3. Moving that provides a kind of counter-experience to a felt-sense and helps in staying fully in touch with a felt-sense in a safe way:

Example: *While moving slowly along the floor, the Focuser was keeping company with a sense of invisibility (a feeling of no boundaries between self and the environment, almost transparency). She asked for her companion to come closer, eventually placing her hands and feet on the Companion's body and gently pushing. The moving point of contact with the Companion allowed for a counter-experience to the 'invisibility' (hands and feet reaching and meeting somebody, restoring a sense of boundaries): in this case the kinetic connection with the Companion, as well as the slow motion out of which it originated, did not match the felt sense, but rather supported a safe counter-experience that nurtured the capacity to be fully present to it. (Reported by Francesca Castaldi as the Focuser.)*

Psychotherapy and Bodywork

Most psychotherapists participating in the MAE 2007 event had a background in Focusing, and thus already recognized the wisdom of the body. They took the opportunity to experiment freely with body movement and touch, interwoven within Focusing-oriented therapy sessions.

Particularly, the taboos of using touch in the day-to-day practice of psychotherapy received much attention. With their focus on the therapeutic relationship, the psychotherapists recognized that strong processes of transference and counter-transference might be evoked when they introduced touch into a session. Important but unexplicated feelings can arise between the client and therapist. Striving for maximum clarity in the client-therapist relationship is a central issue in all psychotherapies.

While touch can hold potential hazards for the psychotherapeutic process, it also holds opportunities. By banning touch from the therapeutic interaction, it can be argued that clients are being deprived of a vital and essential form of human interaction. Practicing

touch during the MAE 2007 event enabled the psychotherapists to feel gradually more at ease in considering *how* it might enhance the psychotherapy session. It was recognized that psychotherapists need a great deal of mentored practice using touch in a safe environment in order to weave it successfully into real therapy sessions. Teaching clients how to utilize empathic touch for themselves was also recognized as one of the safer modes — in a relational sense.

There are many complicated issues involved here, including professional ethics and cultural diversity, which warrant further investigation, particularly in the light of the positive attitude generated within the group. There was a wish to create openings that could further examine where body-centered therapies might prove most successful. Trainings in psychotherapy might then become a potent vehicle for integration and forward movement.

Further Experiential Exercises

Visual imagery: This was explored experientially in a Focusing oriented exercise to gain a sense of the physiological and energetic patterns that shape each of our bodies uniquely and revealingly.

Focusing Attitude: As we introduce Focusing into our professional practice and bring it to our moment-to-moment living, we find that we are cultivating a life-enhancing personal attitude in our relationship with others and to ourselves. The transition is highly rewarding and can be infectious. It creates a special field where we are able to experience everyone — ourselves included — as holistic beings at four levels: physical, energetic, mental, and emotional. A practical demonstration has been formulated to show how bringing the Focusing attitude to empathic touch or massage can help the client to connect in a new and accepting way with his/her ‘inside knowing’ in places of unease about the body. [See at www.focusing.org/bodywork/maefile2.htm]

Inner Voicing: The possibility of being able to elicit a felt shift by sensing into and expressing one’s inner relationships non-verbally through ‘voice frequency resonance’ — assisted by movement and touch, was first explored in triads at the 2005 International Focusing Conference. Following this through at MAE 2007, each person was encouraged to improvise individually on whatever inner pre-articulated sound began to emerge during his or her process, with or without touch. Pointers emerged for further experiments, which are currently under way.

Example: *Participants were invited to ‘be with’ and follow the course of their internally generated sounds (e.g. breath, heartbeat, tummy gurgle, chuckle, yell, spontaneous melody) or, in some cases, recalled sounds (e.g. sea waves). This process led to a variety of spontaneous body movements and vocal ‘resolutions’, and some acknowledged felt shifts in perception. One participant, a professional singer, related her experience in a follow-up email:*

“I am used to singing in a very structured situation, confronted with parameters that limit a deeper expression of myself. When exploring in our group, I had the possibility of touching all of my resistances. I remember very well

my felt sense in those moments and how it changed during the experience... the sense, freedom and pleasure of an inner self 'being realized'. I have now re-discovered the pleasure of singing just for myself, without judgment... but the greatest thing was the weekend after the event when I performed three concerts, and I was different — my body, my legs, the movement, the feeling inside me, something happened."

At the finale to MAE 2007 the process was replicated with the entire group of 40-plus participants in a moving collective attunement. Participants remarked upon their having noticed 'spontaneous internal shifts' and requested further exploration of this method of non-verbal connection, expression and communication as a way to further enrich the Focusing experience. (Reported by Larry Hurst.)

Contact Balance: The ethics, comfort/discomfort and experience of weight sharing between Focuser-mover and physically supportive companion were explored in dyads and then shared with the group.

Body Mapping: This was a step-by-step means of entering more deeply into felt sensing and felt experiencing, using a personal pictorial tracing of body shape and feelings, layer by layer.

Three-way Focusing Touch Partnership: Consider how a Focusing partnership creates a shareable space; then imagine the power of 'listening hands' in this 'package of availability' from the provider or providers. The following experiment involved a triad of participants taking turns as (1) a Focuser, (2) a Verbal Listener and (3) a 'Touch-Listener'. The outcome has led the participants to consider the prospect of trying other combinations of position, sequence, etc.

Example: The Focuser sat at the front of a chaise-lounge and leaned back against the legs of the Touch-Listener. The Touch-Listener sat in a comfortable position in the chaise-lounge and supported the head and neck of the Focuser with his/her hands. The Verbal Listener sat in front and to the side of the Focuser. While the Focuser and Verbal Listener engaged in a traditional Focusing exchange, the Touch-Listener maintained a 'listening attitude' with the hands, and so provided a touch feedback parallel to the feedback of the Verbal Listener. The support given to the neck and head naturally led the attention towards "really feeling into" that area and working with it as a place of exploration. Each participant reported something intrinsically extraordinary in these sessions, something beyond what is normally experienced in a Focusing session, be it a vividness, a clarity — "the light of the day" as one participant put it — or a more sure feeling of being supported. Another participant sensed "some further dimensionality... and it isn't clear yet what it can do". (Reported by Stephen Scholle, Nicoletta Corsetti, and Robert Lee from the 2008 Montreal International Focusing Conference Bodywork-Focusing Interest Group.)

Working with Inexperienced Clients: The importance of facilitating body awareness in new clients was discussed and demonstrated. Particular emphasis was placed on finding the best ways of leading a client into the process while staying true to the client's expressed agenda. Our discussion also served to illustrate the benefits to bodywork practitioners of receiving formal training in Focusing.

MOVING FORWARD

Training and Teaching: Teaching Focusing to bodyworkers is now ongoing across the world, including Europe, the USA, Argentina, Mexico and Japan. Teaching a Bodywork-Focusing approach to professional counselors and psychotherapists in Japan started in 2004 and is also ongoing. Six of the seven members of the MAE core team are now Focusing Trainers; one is a Focusing Institute Certifying Coordinator, and one a body-centered psychotherapist doing research with touch.

Bringing Bodywork, Movement and Allied Body-Centered Modalities to Focusing: The members of the Focusing Bodywork and Movement Group are continuing to bring a Focusing oriented approach to their respective specialties. They are also active in facilitating a more overtly body-centered approach to Focusing. These combined aims are being pursued through articles, classes, and sessions with clients and symposia with colleagues. A Yahoo Discussion Group has been available since 2005. A second multidisciplinary international gathering, MAE 2009, is planned for September 2009 in Switzerland. Details can be found at www.mae2009.org. The core development team continues to meet monthly by conference call. It is a testament to the synergy of body-logic and Focusing that our interest group continues to flourish and grow and, through its process of unique collaboration, has managed to evolve into this article for *Folio*.

CONCLUSION

The rich weaving of Focusing with a whole range of body-centering modalities has begun to open up a new creative paradigm for the caring professions and their clients. It has the capacity and potential to bridge inter-professional separations and alienations. Those of us touched by these crossings are moved by the deepening of inner awareness as well as by the richness of mutuality in the work. In the wider community, its application to everyday self-care and to self-expression, whether at work or play, has yet to be fully explored and realized. The potential is there — And the desire?

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Jack Blackburn, Trager practitioner, Master's in theological studies, Focusing trainer, registered counselor, specializes in body centered spiritual growth and healing. He teaches continuing education classes to bodyworkers and other caregiving professionals. Website: www.presencingsource.com

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LET THE FELT SENSE SPEAK IN ENGLISH

Experiential Learning and Teaching of English as a Second Language

Akiko Doi, Ph. D.

1. INTRODUCTION

I encountered Focusing by accident. After working as a translator for 6 years, I decided to go back to school to study clinical psychology. When I went into the counseling class, I met Dr. Ikemi, a Certifying Coordinator in Kobe, who was the lecturer of the class. He had just been transferred from Okayama University, and I became one of his first graduate students in Kobe College. I had never heard anything about Focusing, nor about Gene Gendlin or his experiential theory. In the counseling class, Dr. Ikemi taught us Focusing, and we read Gendlin's articles. That was the beginning.

One of the reasons I quit my job as a translator and became a graduate student was that I wanted to explore: *Why our feelings change when we talk about the feelings...* Therefore, I was immediately fascinated with "The Theory of Personality Change" (Gendlin, 1964). However, I had difficulties in following the 6 steps; it felt so clumsy and awkward for me. I wondered if I might not be able to practice Focusing, even though I was attracted by Gendlin's theory.

In the first two or three years of the graduate course, I had two problems. The first one was about Focusing. I found Gene's papers fascinating, but was still unwilling to practice Focusing. I was reluctant to get into the Focusing world because I mistakenly believed that the 6 steps were the prerequisite to practice Focusing. In the meanwhile, as I worked as a translator, I was often asked to translate workshops offered by Focusing trainers from English speaking countries, including Elfie Hinterkopf, Kye Nelson and Kevin McEvenue. In those workshops (I was then just a beginner in Focusing), I got acquainted with people who were very active in the Japanese Focusing community with long and extensive Focusing experiences (they were then called "Core Members" of the Japan Focusing Association). They seemed to be enjoying their lives with Focusing; I admired the way they lived their lives, which made me feel that "something" about Focusing was meaningful to me, but the "clumsy" feeling around Focusing still prevented me from devoting myself to Focusing.

The other problem was communication in English. I had been learning English since I was 13, and I used English as a tool in my job for several years. Even so, I did not feel as if I was "communicating" with people in English. I could make myself understood in English and I could understand what English speakers were saying. I was a professional translator — yet I did not feel that I was talking to a human being. It felt like there was a thin membrane barrier between me and the person I talked to, and I could not reach the person. I felt like I was playing a role, or the communication was not real or alive.

2. FOCUSING AND ENGLISH: SPEAKING FROM THE FELT SENSE

Around the time I entered the doctoral program, I came to notice that using the 6 steps was not the only way to do Focusing. It was simply a way to explain or teach Focusing, but there was ‘more’... it was not ‘*the whole thing*’... Focusing is a process or the interaction happening within and between people. It is not something that is used or happens only in psychotherapy, but also in everyday life, and in many forms.

Acknowledging that Focusing is applicable to anything — and is something that happens in every moment of my life — I came to appreciate “*how I feel*” more than “*how I should be*”; I became more flexible and more accepting with others. That means I became less “structured” or “6 steps-bound” (Gendlin, 1964).

As I gradually noticed that I could do Focusing without the 6 steps, my communication problem in English started to change, as well. I have been attending the Focusing International Conferences and Focusing workshops offered in English, as both a participant and a translator. To my surprise, I found myself feeling that “I am talking to a living person” in those conferences and workshops. After more than 20 years of using English, I could feel that my communication was alive and the communication was heart-to-heart, where I could touch the immediate and subtle feelings occurring between us.

This change in communication opened a whole new world for me. I had believed (for me) that English could not be more than a “tool” to convey the “colorless contents” and almost gave up the hope of making “friends” with English speakers. I was able to understand the content of what people were saying, but I could not ‘*relate*’ to how they were feeling, nor could I touch the texture and color of their feelings. That was one of the reasons I did not try to study abroad. I did not think I could stand living in a foreign country with a transparent membrane barrier between me and others. Yet with Focusing, the communication suddenly turned ‘colorful’, and for the first time in my life, I could feel that English speaking people were also human beings and had feelings that I could actually relate to. Focusing worked to lift up the transparent, persistent membrane barrier that had prevented me from reaching the person: the English communication gained a whole new life and brand new colors.

What brought about this big change? It was that I now knew how to speak *from the felt sense*. Speaking from the felt sense and trying to feel the felt sense of others has given *life* to my English communication.

3. EXPLORATION OF A NEW WAY TO APPLY FOCUSING INTO ENGLISH/ SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

From this new understanding that speaking from the felt sense led to real and meaningful communication, plus the feeling that I was ‘allowed’ to do Focusing in my own way, I started to notice that I could easily make some new combinations. I started to apply Focusing to English (i.e. a second language) teaching (Doi, 2008a and 2008b). I have been teaching English to undergraduate students.

My class is called “English Workshop”, the aim of which is to offer students opportunities to do something in English that might enhance their motivation to study English; however, it was difficult to run the class. I was shocked on the very first day of the class to discover that most of my students DID NOT like English AT ALL! Almost 80% of them hated English. They took the class because the class was compulsory. They were very reluctant to learn English in the traditional way: learning grammar, memorizing words, or reading English texts. This was not a happy situation — either for me or my students. I wanted to make the class happier, not only for the students, but also for myself to enjoy teaching.

In order to find a new way to enhance the motivation of the students, I decided to put Focusing *essence* into my teaching. We started with the non-verbal and less-verbal exercises to decrease the students’ reluctance and fear of English. One of the exercises was NARABI (Takeuchi, 1990). NARABI stands for “standing or queuing side by side”. In this exercise, students are paired up and invited to explore the best way of being together without using words. They were asked to try various postures and distances between them. Every pair found a beautiful way of being together.

For example, in one pair, they found that “standing” felt uncomfortable, so they sat down side-by-side very closely, their shoulders touching the other’s shoulder, and their smiling eyes looking into the other’s eyes — from time to time. Another pair chose to stand, but each of them moved together slightly to the right keeping about one meter distance between them, and intentionally not letting their eyes meet directly. Although each pair showed different ways of “NARABI”, they all looked satisfied and settled, and most of them were smiling. The classroom was filled with a quiet, warm and caring atmosphere.

Another exercise was the Approach Exercise, developed by Janet Klein (Klein, 1995). The Approach Exercise is an exercise to find a right relational distance with a partner, by paying attention to one’s own body sense. The students were paired up, standing face to face. One person stood still, while the other began to approach, very slowly. The person who was standing still was asked to notice their *body-sense*, while the approaching partner carefully moved forward. When he or she felt that the approaching person had come too close, the standing person immediately said, “STOP”, and the standing person was asked to notice how his/her body sense changed. Then, the approaching person stepped back a little, and approached again. When the bodily-felt-sense said, “It felt *too close*” to the standing person, s/he said, “STOP” again. In this way, the person standing was much more aware of how precisely the body sense *knows* what the right distance is to the approaching person — and how the body knows ‘*more*’ than just cognitive understanding. I also had the students read *How to Teach a Workshop in Focusing: A Two-Hour Script that can be Amended for Day-Longs, Classes, or Presentations of any Length* (Klagsbrun, 1999). After they read the explanation of the Approach Exercise, I invited them to try it. It was easy for them because the only English they had to use was “stop”.

After trying those non-verbal/less-verbal exercises, I felt the students relax, and their fear of using English was decreased. I then proceeded to introduce exercises that required more English, such as Clearing A Space, along with drawing and collage making. For both exercises, I prepared worksheets highlighting some Focusing-oriented questions. By answering those questions, they learned how to *be themselves* with a Focusing Attitude, e.g. caring,

respect, listening, non-judgment, and by sharing their answers, they experienced how each of them was different.

These Focusing exercises, with their playfulness, grabbed my students' hearts. At the beginning of the course, my students seemed to hate even English dictionaries, but as I used Focusing, they became so eager to consult the dictionary because they really wanted to "communicate" with each other. They wanted to share what was happening within themselves to their classmates. With the help of Focusing, they found a completely new way of relating from within themselves to English. Some of the students told me that they had never imagined that they could learn English with such playfulness. For them, studying English always required discipline, and nothing more than that. However, in my class, they found a way to learn and communicate freshly from their felt sense. That is the advantage of Focusing-oriented teaching and learning.

4. HOW HAS KNOWING AND USING FOCUSING MADE A DIFFERENCE IN MY ENGLISH/SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Another advantage of Focusing-oriented teaching is that the teacher's Focusing Attitude can offer a "safe atmosphere" for the class. The teacher with the Focusing Attitude accepts anything that comes from the students, waits for and appreciates the spontaneous interactions among students. With the help of the teacher's Focusing Attitude, students are motivated to learn English, and more importantly, are far less worried about making errors.

With the Focusing Attitude, the teacher also feels safe, allowing him/her self to be free from clinging to the syllabus. The teacher can decide "What to Do" in class based on the felt sense at every moment of the class. In addition, Focusing-oriented teaching leaves a margin where everyone is allowed to be different — and it is *OK* — again contributing to the creation of a safe atmosphere in the class.

What was important in this Focusing-Oriented way of teaching English was that all of the students came to feel deeply connected with each other. The class became a naturally-formed "home group" or felt community. It was, to tell the truth, beyond my expectations. Each student spontaneously learned to respect and appreciate each other's felt sense and enjoyed the differences in how they felt or experienced.

I believe that this was a much more precious experience in their lives than simply memorizing new English words or just gaining the textbook, paper-and-pencil knowledge of English. Teaching students that there are ways to access their own body's inner wisdom is a wonderful gift that a teacher can give in the classroom.

4. WHOLE-PERSON LEARNING: HELPING STUDENT TO AVOID BECOMING "TOURISTS"

Another important aspect of Focusing-Oriented teaching is that it enables what Rogers and Freiburg (1994) called "whole-person learning" (Doi, 2008a). According to Rogers and Freiberg, whole-person learning is defined as follows:

“Significant learning combines the logical and intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning. When we learn in that way, we are whole: we use all our masculine and feminine capacities” (1994, p.37).

However, as Rogers and Freiberg (1994) point out, there are often too many “tourists” in the classroom. The tourists in the classroom “rarely get called on by the teacher and seldom raise their hands to volunteer information”, and “Given the opportunity, they sit in the back of the room and try to be invisible when it’s time to participate.” They are “never involved, never excited, never chosen . . . simply here” (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). Unfortunately, in many classes, we see those “tourists”.

The Focusing-oriented English teaching was an attempt to help students avoid becoming “tourists”. Not only did I pay attention to maintaining a safe atmosphere, I also emphasized that the “process” was more important than the “content”. The students did not have to worry about the evaluation made at the end of the semester based on what they achieved. Rather, they were encouraged to enjoy the process, and explicate the process. In other traditional classes, they were always worried about how the teachers tested them, but in my class, they felt safe and free to express what was going on within them. As a result, the students became active and spontaneous.

Rogers and Freiberg (1994) also indicate that whole-person learning requires “soma”, namely, body *and* mind, feelings *and* intellect. With the help of Focusing, students can experience not only the cognitive aspect of learning, but also the learning that comes from their *own experiences* and *felt senses*. Bodily-based learning is more precious than the merely cognitive learning because “our heads forget, but our bodies remember” (McEvenue, 2007). The true learning is brought about when students study spontaneously, relating to their *whole body* learning. Focusing-oriented teaching can lead students to *whole-person* learning!

6. CONCLUSION

Looking back at my experiences of Focusing-oriented English teaching, I realized that what was most important for me was not teaching English itself, but creating *possibilities*... I could support and encourage the students to start communicating with one another to form a *felt-community*. Of course I was happy to hear that some students commented that their English skills had increased; however, I was much more touched when they remarked that they could make new friends and feel connected to one another.

Focusing worked as a “non-structural structure” in the class. Because of the nature of Focusing, the teacher did not stick to the syllabus; however, *Focusing itself was a structure* that supported the class. The safe and free atmosphere was nurtured because the teacher did not cling to the fixed structure (for example, the 6 steps); rather, an atmosphere was created between the teachers and students by being faithful to their own felt sense. As a result, Focusing allows the students to touch down inside and to interact, based on the bodily experiences. Focusing helps the whole-person learning to happen in classrooms.

Focusing is a way to encourage people to learn English as a second language. It offers the safe atmosphere as well as increases the motivation to communicate “more” because people are aware that they have “something” inside of them: their own felt sense. When they allow their felt sense to speak, they can exceed the mental barrier created by the worries of making errors.

Focusing assists a teacher to sense “what is needed most here” and “what is the right way” to work with students based on the teacher’s felt sense. The class can be dynamic, and both the teacher and the students can wait for next steps to emerge. One of the students told me how thrilling it felt to her to be taught in this way.

The real communication happens when we speak from the felt sense. Studying grammar and vocabulary builds a basis for language, but to give a life to our communication we need to speak from the felt sense. When we speak from the felt sense, English becomes alive; in other words, languages, when used without a felt sense, seems dead.

Focusing opened a whole new world for me. It showed me a new way of relating to others in English, which then gave me new ideas of Focusing-oriented English teaching. Let us speak from our felt sense. The felt sense allows our concerns about making errors to disappear when we speak in our second language. Most importantly, the felt sense facilitates heart-to-heart communication.

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FINDING SANCTUARY IN A STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

The Use of Clearing a Space to Enhance Learning for College and Graduate Students

Joan Klagsbrun Ph.D.

The evils which we suffer in education... in the whole separation of knowledge and practice — all testify to the necessity of seeing mind-body as an integral whole.

— John Dewey, American Educator

ABSTRACT

Clearing a Space, the first movement of Focusing, is an effective tool in preparing students to become more present and receptive for learning in class. It seems to function as a powerful stress-reduction measure. After taking an inventory of their current felt problems or stressors, which are gently placed aside, students are guided to find a cleared space or sanctuary within. This process allows them to find the way back to a positive sense of self, increase the capacity to be in the present, and set a clear intention for learning. This paper describes the origins and evolution of Clearing a Space; demonstrates the need for this practice, in and out of the classroom environment; and describes how it effectively reduces stress. The benefits of Clearing a Space are discussed, and a protocol for its practice is included.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF CLEARING A SPACE

*You do not know what life means when all the difficulties are removed!
It is like eating sweet dessert the first thing in the morning.*

— Jane Addams, Pacifist, Feminist
and Nobel prize winner

History

When Eugene Gendlin refined the Focusing method in the 1970s, he noticed that if practitioners initially engaged in sensing their bodies from the inside, named the current issues that were impinging on them, and imagined placing these issues at the right distance outside of the body, the Focusing process that followed was often deeper and more effective. He found this step of engaging with one's issues *while not becoming consumed by them*, an excellent prologue to Focusing. This new step was effective enough to be incorporated as one of the six movements of the Focusing method (Gendlin, 1981). Gendlin called this preliminary movement by several names: "putting things down", "making space" and finally "Clearing a Space"(Gendlin, 1979, 1982). Over time, he came to think that this preliminary

step was the most effective movement to teach first, in order to impart the essence of Focusing. In one article he said, "If it succeeds, it seems to me the subsequent Focusing is much better" (1979, p.1).

During the next decade many Focusing practitioners discovered that Clearing a Space appeared to also function as a freestanding and rapid stress management tool (McGuire,1984; McDonald, 1984; Fisch, 1984). These practitioners showed that when working with highly stressed or even suicidal individuals, helping them to experience a sense of a self, separate from their issues, facilitated a shift in their whole experience of the problem. (These sessions were all in the presence of, and with guidance from, a caring therapist.) Over time, many practitioners used Clearing a Space as a stand alone technique, including for individuals facing cancer (Grindler Katonah, 1982, 1999; Kantor 1999; Somerville 1999; Klagsbrun 1999, 2007 and Klagsbrun, Rappaport, Marcow -Speiser, Post, Byers, Stepakoff, and Karmann, 2006). Focusing directly on the "OK" or "all fine" place, rather than on the problem, appeared to provide a sense of hopefulness, spaciousness, and new life energy for clients with a cancer diagnosis. During this same time period, some educators were discovering the transformative possibilities of Clearing a Space in schools (McGuire,1996; Stapert,1997).

Clearing a Space in School

One important early initiative was a project conducted by Mary McGuire (1986), in which Clearing a Space was taught to elementary school students. McGuire wanted to educate children to understand that they did not have to either avoid or feel overwhelmed by their problems. She hoped that by teaching the children to learn — early in life — how not to carry stress in their bodies, later developed stress-related illnesses such as ulcers, migraine headaches, and heart attacks might be prevented. Also, by learning to listen to and trust their inner knowing, McGuire believed that the children would gain a greater sense of self-control and a heightened awareness of their own resources in problem-solving, thereby reducing some of the negative influences of peer pressure. The children took to the Clearing a Space easily, imagining placing their problems under a mattress, in the freezer, or sending them on an airplane to Florida.

Marta Stapert (1997) has also been a central force in continuing to develop a Clearing a Space for elementary school-aged children. She created a teaching manual for Clearing a Space with children, worked in several countries, and trained practitioners worldwide through international conferences. Over 70 articles on Clearing a Space and Focusing with children in schools (<http://www.focusing.org/chfc/index.html>) demonstrate the widespread and successful use of this approach.

Improving School Performance

Over the past three decades, there has also been quantitative research on Clearing a Space's effect on learning in school. In a review article, Parker (2003) summarizes evidence from a series of five studies using Clearing a Space (Zimring 1974,1983,1988, 1990.) This summary indicates that performance improved on complex mental tasks requiring attention to internally generated stimuli. It appears that Clearing a Space, which trains a person to

reflect inwardly, strengthens one's attention and focus. The ability to be present and available for learning is critical for all students. However, it is not just younger students who need help to reduce their stress levels before settling down to learn; a complex and daunting series of stressors beset college and graduate students, as well.

STRESS AND LEARNING

Stress, defined here as any factor that places undue demands on the individual's ability to adapt, often has a deleterious effect on one's cognitive capacities. Intense and prolonged stress can produce cognitive impairments in the part of the brain that affects memory and spatial relations, as well as increasing the intensity and frequency of the fight or flight response (Parks 2003). High stress levels diminish one's capacity to absorb new information and to remember what has been learned. Learning and retaining information are key skills in higher education.

Both college and graduate students come to school under the burden of a large number of stressors and distractions. College students find themselves suddenly catapulted into a new and relatively unstructured environment. They must deal with separation from home and family, the vagaries of intimate relationships, in late adolescence or early adulthood, as well as issues of identity and purpose. A similar list of stressors applies to graduate students, often with the addition of the financial pressures of managing a household, long commuting times, the demands of a family, and working part or full-time to pay for their education.

Common to all students is the fact that the burden of their non-academic life is carried with them into the classroom. And, of course, academic life has its own set of stressors: exams, time management, extracurricular activities, social life, writing papers, etc. In a recent survey by the Associated Press of college students (Fram, 2008) confirms that the stress load of students is a significant factor in diminishing their ability to be intellectually and emotionally present in class.

One additional significant stressor on students is the shift in cultural stimulation. Most students come from a culture characterized by rapid doses of highly stimulating information. Witness modern television commercials, MTV, video or arcade games, and popular movies, and you will see an environment that is faster, more intense, of shorter duration, and, on the whole, more stimulating than the one you would find in the average college or graduate school classroom. The relatively low-stimulation environment of the classroom, plus high stress levels carried over from non-class experiences, are a direct impediment to a person's ability to pay attention to, and be receptive to, the learning offered in a classroom setting.

Unfortunately, there are few places where the difficulties of making the transition from "real life" to the classroom are recognized and dealt with effectively. In one study, middle-school inner-city teachers trained students in relaxation response exercises. The students who had two semesters of exposure to these relaxation exercises developed improved work habits and higher grade-point averages than the control group (Benson, 2000).

The brain is a plastic and highly adaptable medium. New findings in neuroscience demonstrate that the way we focus our attention determines which neural circuits are activated. Optimal learning requires brain adaptability, and stress reduction techniques that

improve adaptability both cognitively and emotionally (Seigel 2008). According to Siegel, inner reflection develops the prefrontal cortex, which influences our compassion and empathy for others, as well as for ourselves. He believes that such practices, which cultivate our social/ emotional competence, also promote academic success. Clearing a Space, with its emphasis on self-acceptance and inner reflection, provides just the kind of activity that Siegel believes will harness neural plasticity.

It seems evident that teachers could benefit from the implementation of stress-reduction methods to help students become more present and ready to be engaged in class. Even teachers who understand how to achieve a sense of presence when stressed themselves are rarely well-versed in helping their students achieve a state of receptivity at the beginning of a class. In my experience, and from the clinical experiences and research that my colleagues and I have completed (Grindler Katonah, 1999; Klagsbrun, 1999; Klagsbrun et al, 2006; Klagsbrun, 2007), Clearing a Space appears to be a unique and effective tool for rapid stress reduction. I propose that the Clearing a Space method should be an explicit part of any college or graduate school curriculum. The effective use of this brief practice would offer both teachers and students an opportunity to become more centered, calmer and more ready and able to engage with the material in class.

WHAT MAKES CLEARING A SPACE UNIQUE?

Following are three explanations for how Clearing a Space reduces stress:

It invites us to separate each distinct issue, thereby incrementally releasing bodily tension.

We carry stressful situations in the body as physical tension that is often specific to each psychological issue—such as tightness in the stomach about one issue, shallow breathing and constriction about another, and tight shoulders about a third. However, we often feel the stress as one big, indiscriminate knot. When we try to turn our attention away from the problems, often the body retains its stress, tension, or agitation. For many individuals, placing the generalized feeling of agitation, malaise, or anger aside all at once while trying to concentrate on something else, often does not work well. However, with Clearing a Space, we attend to how the body is carrying *each* stressor or problem, and then, strand by strand, mentally place “all about *that one*” aside. This specificity allows us to relax the particular bodily tightness or constriction attached to each issue. This method of *incremental relaxation*, removing issue by issue, can be beneficial — especially for those who cannot achieve a relaxation response in other ways. Even for those who are able to globally put aside their stressors, identifying and tagging each issue, sensing how you are without it, and finding the right distance from it, can be very therapeutic.

It teaches us to name and relate to each issue without trying to solve it.

The Clearing a Space method invites the student to actively take an inventory of what is *in the way* of feeling present and ready for class, and to then discover how it would be if

all of those impediments to feeling present were removed. Whether feeling anxious, fearful, angry, scattered, fatigued, preoccupied or distracted, taking some time to identify what is “between me and feeling fine” or “what is between me and being ready to be in class”, helps change the student’s relationship to their problems (which usually are the current obstacles to well-being and effective learning). This process teaches the person to notice what the body is carrying, without having to work on or solve the problem right away. Instead of getting overwhelmed or avoiding the issue, the person experiences a new way of relating to the issues. This paradigm shift often brings physical and psychological relief, new energy, and a fresh perspective on the problems.

It welcomes us to be in the ‘clear’ or ‘all fine’ space so we have a few moments in a stress-free zone.

Clearing a Space uniquely involves explicitly naming and setting aside each person’s current stressors. While these stressors might be named aloud to a partner, the inventory can also be taken as a silent and private guided exercise. By identifying and articulating all the issues that comprise our stress load, and metaphorically placing the identified stressors “at a safe distance”, the student gains some a sense of control over that stressor. More importantly, the student gets to experience what it *would feel like on a bodily level if all those impediments to feeling good were removed*. The student is being asked, in an indirect way, to summon up his or her optimal internal state of being ‘all fine.’ Interestingly, this cleared space is usually more than a neutral space of merely being all right; it often seems to open the Focuser into a broader spiritual experience. Many students report feeling calm, spacious, at peace, and in harmony with themselves; some report feeling a sense of unity and spirituality.

WHY CLEARING A SPACE IS EFFECTIVE

For such a brief practice (approximately ten to fifteen minutes), Clearing a Space can be surprisingly effective. Why is it that this practice can achieve such a rapid shift of perspective, energy and mood? Some possible explanations are that Clearing a Space:

1. Creates a “frame” which has as its basic assumption the idea that feeling “OK” is our natural state:

The concept that our lives have presented us with a number of obstacles that currently block our ability to “feel OK”, and that we have tools to remove these blocks, is essentially optimistic and empowering. The “frame” implies that we are basically OK, and that we now have the resources to move back toward that state.

2. Shows us how to have a relationship with our “issues”:

We attempt to treat ourselves with an **attitude of compassion, self-acceptance and friendliness**. This is not a forced acceptance of what feels unacceptable—it is simply a

“friendly” acknowledgement of whatever is there. It is as if we are saying “hello” to our issues and making a space for them, giving them credibility, but at the same time denying them any dictatorial power. This model for a compassionate relationship with difficult issues can be a potent form of stress reduction. While critical and judgmental attitudes close off lines of communication and increase stress levels, a welcoming attitude allows us to hear from parts of ourselves that have been previously inaccessible and brings some softening and stress relief.

3. Gives a name to whatever we are sensing inside that was previously unnamable but which has been a source of stress, tension, or anxiety.

This “thing” sensed inside (the ‘felt sense’) might be named as a recognizable issue such as *frustration with my boss* about not giving me a raise, which I know is connected to a tight and contracted feeling in my chest; or it may be an unknown *something* that is unclear but distinctly felt in the body, such as *a knot of dread in the pit of my stomach that I don’t yet understand*. Either way, we are empowered to use Clearing a Space as a tool for identifying those sensations that are not yet symbolized through words. By recognizing and naming them, we begin the process of releasing their hold over us.

4. Helps us to put each of these issues at the right distance away, outside the body — thus creating a sense of a larger self that is not constrained by our problems and limitations:

Some people use imagery to place the issues away— such as wrapping them up like a package and placing them next to where one is sitting; or placing them in a boat and sending them out to sea, or finding a spot where each one belongs. One student reported giving her first issue to a close friend who held it lovingly, placing a second issue in a large see-through container by her side, and sending her third problem to Kansas, hundreds of miles away. This act of tailoring the image to the *right “packaging”* and setting it at *“the right distance”* allows each person to invent a personal method of managing the stress inherent in that issue that works best. It employs **the intelligence of the body/mind, which seems to know how and where each issue needs to be placed** so that one gets respite from it. In this process, each person learns how to achieve a state that is neither abandoning problems nor confronting them, but merely “parking” them at a comfortable distance in order to be present for the task at hand (i.e. being present in class). The message of this practice is that each of us has the capacity to hold our issues without becoming contaminated by them, and to accurately find what will bring our lives forward.

5. Brings to light our background sense:

In addition to the inventory that comes from the body’s experience of what it is carrying in the moment, we are asked to identify a *background* sense—that familiar quality that is like the wallpaper that we don’t even see any more — that is there, coloring our whole present-time life experience. A *background* sense is like an *always* feeling, such as *always* feeling driven, or *always* sad, or *always* pressured, unprepared, bored, disconnected, racing,

anxious or exhausted. The *background* sense might also be positive, such as *always* feeling excited, or eager, or content. By discovering this *background* sense, we get a more global perception of what is *between us and feeling fine*. Students often feel the greatest relief from realizing that there *is* a background sense, and then identifying and placing it at the right distance away.

6. Gives us a glimpse of what it would be like to experience ourselves without our familiar concerns and weighty issues:

As we take a minute or two to dwell in the cleared or clearer space, we feel more enabled to experience what it would be like to live without all those tangles that comprise our tension or heaviness, and compromise our sense of well being. This is an important moment and often a rare experience for many individuals. Without those burdens, most people report feeling lighter, less weighed down, and more how they are when they are at their best. They describe this feeling variously as feeling calm, or spacious, or finding a bigger perspective, or getting connected to their aliveness and energy.

While the process of Clearing a Space is relatively brief, it is quite unique. The aforementioned six explanations of why it is effective in reducing stress are not totally comprehensive; however, the points suggest some of the reasons that this method can efficiently shift energy, perspective, and transform mood.

CLEARING A SPACE IN CONJUNCTION WITH COLLEGE OR GRADUATE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

There are two ways that Clearing a Space can be incorporated at the start of a class—teacher facilitated or peer partnerships:

Teacher Facilitated: The teacher begins the class by guiding the students through the CAS protocol. Students are invited to become aware of their breathing, to relax, to come into silence, to remember a time when they had a sense of peace or well being, and to identify, name and metaphorically set the issues weighing on them at the right distance outside their body. If students are in a positive place, they spend time noticing what has contributed to their feeling so good.

A constructive relationship between teacher and student often develops as teachers convey acceptance and permission through their tone of voice when guiding students in CAS. Students typically feel that their full selves are welcome in the class. The teacher is then *'experienced'* as validating students as they are, as well as offering something of value that assists students in making the transition from their busy lives into the classroom environment.

Peer Partnerships: The second way to incorporate Clearing a Space into class involves students finding a partner and taking turns reading each other the protocol. In this alternative model, students can choose to keep their issues silent or, if they feel safe and comfortable with their fellow student, they can say out loud what is in their way of being fully present for class that day.

Often, when a student shares with a fellow student, either by following the process in silence or aloud, a sense of trust often develops. Consequently, an intimacy and bond occurs that has many benefits, such as: reducing the sense of isolation which many students face; reducing stress by feeling that one's situation is held and validated by a peer, often increasing mood, and creating the possibility of new friendships. Having someone *hold the space* while doing this personal and inner reflection can also allow the student to go deeper into clearing out the difficulties, because the process taps into the power of human connection.

COMPARING CLEARING A SPACE TO MEDITATION AND OTHER CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

There are some similarities between Clearing a Space and other contemplative practices such as the relaxation response, meditation, and yoga. All four methods lead to a calming of the sympathetic nervous system, and all involve turning inward and using silence as part of their practice. However, there are some interesting differences between Clearing a Space and the contemplative methods.

First, instead of giving only bare attention to the stressor, as one does in meditation, in Clearing A Space one directs one's attention fully to a concern or difficulty, and then observes how the body is carrying that issue. Second, in Clearing A Space one attends to the *felt sense* level of experience — that vague, elusive preverbal sense of *something* that you can distinctly feel in the body. Meditation sees images, thoughts and emotions as quite separate phenomena (Grindler Katonah, 2006).

Third, imagery usually does not play a significant role in meditation. It is, however, an integral element of Clearing A Space. It can be creatively employed by the student as a unique way to place each stressful concern outside the body.

Finally, Clearing A Space also has a relational dimension. This contrasts with relaxation and meditation, which are generally used as solo practices. Whether it is the teacher-student relationship that is improved (through the teacher's voice getting connected to the reduction in stress), or whether it is contact with another student (creating a sense of intimacy and connectedness), there is a communal benefit that comes from the relational aspect of this process. The class becomes engaged in a unified way, and shares a common practice. Moreover, the relational aspect also speaks to a special aspect of Clearing a Space in which one develops a relationship with one's issues—saying “hello” to them and trying to bring a respectful friendliness towards them. In return for this gentle acknowledgement, the issues are often more willing to be temporarily placed out of the body, offering some needed respite from them.

STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO THE CLEARING A SPACE PRACTICE

Students deeply appreciate the 10-15 minutes to collect and center themselves, and are much more present. Any concern about the “lost time” of teaching is made up by the

students' increase in attentiveness and engagement with the class material. One informal measure I have for the effectiveness of this tool of Clearing a Space is how punctual students are. I have asked students who arrive late, to please wait outside the classroom until the Clearing a Space time is complete, so as not to disturb the others. Rarely does anyone arrive late! And, if by chance I forget to start class with this practice, students remind me to stop and help them to Clear a Space. In my evaluations from over 30 years of teaching, students have repeatedly mentioned how helpful Clearing a Space has been. They report that it helps them with their transition to school from wherever they were before, or as they change from one class to another. Students then realize that getting themselves physically to class doesn't assure that they are truly present. Many have also reported that over time, Clearing a Space becomes a practice that they can use outside of class as well, whenever they feel overwhelmed or weighed down. They are able to generalize its use to any stress-laden situation.

CONCLUSION

Clearing a Space provides many advantages to teachers and students.

It is a harmonizing practice that connects mind/body and spirit — a process that is physical (works with the body), mental (works with attention, intention, and meaning), and spiritual (creates a broader perspective). It is a very effective way of preparing students for a new learning experience by encouraging them to become more present to themselves, more

Protocol for Guiding Students Through Clearing a Space

The following are instructions for either the teacher or the students to read. If the peer method is being used, instead of pausing for the prescribed amount of time, the partners can give each other a signal, such as lifting a finger, to indicate that they are ready for the next instruction.

1. When you are ready, you might allow your eyes to close (or you can keep them open if you prefer), and begin to get comfortable in your chair. You might let yourself take a few slow, deep breaths, and then allow your attention to gently rest in the center of your body. (PAUSE)
2. Let's begin by remembering a time or place in which you felt a sense of well being, or peacefulness (and if you can't remember such a time, you might just imagine one). (PAUSE)

Allow yourself to get there with all your senses — what does it smell like, what do you see? What does it feel like to be you, with this sense of well being? (PAUSE)

3. Now, see if there is anything between you right now and that sense of well-being that you recalled. Ask yourself, "What's in the way of feeling fine?" (PAUSE) Don't answer, but let what comes in your body do the answering. Wait for a felt

sense of one concern to form. (10 second PAUSE) If no concerns are present, you might keep your attention on the sense of peace or well-being.

4. If there is something in the way of feeling perfectly fine, see if there is a word, a phrase, or an image that captures the quality of how the concern feels in your body. (5 second PAUSE) Say the word, phrase, or image back to yourself, and check to see if it fits the sense you have there exactly.
5. Now give this concern your accepting, friendly attention for a few moments, so that you can acknowledge that it's really there (5 second PAUSE). Then, put it aside for a while by imagining that you are placing it outside of your body, in a safe place. Sometimes it helps to imagine that you're sitting on a park bench, and each concern can be wrapped up like a package, and placed on the park bench next to you—or at whatever distance away would feel right. It sometimes helps to take a big exhalation to breathe it out. (10 second PAUSE)
6. As you bring your attention back into your body, notice if you now feel a little lighter or clearer inside without that one. (PAUSE)
7. Now again, bring your attention inside and ask, "Except for that, am I feeling fine?" (5 seconds). Wait and see if something else wants your attention next.
8. If something else comes up, wait for a felt sense of that concern to form (PAUSE), and see if a word, phrase, or image captures the quality of how this concern feels in your body. (PAUSE) And then, after spending a little time with it, place it outside your body in a safe place as well. (10 second PAUSE) Notice if you feel a little lighter or clearer inside without that one. (PAUSE)
9. (If the person seems to have another concern that is in the way of feeling fine, repeat steps 7 and 8 again before continuing. Check to see if they have cleared their concerns). Now, in addition to those issues and concerns you have placed aside, most of us have a *background* sense — always feeling a little anxious, or sad, or harried, or tense — see if you can find a background sense that's there for you today. Now, see if you can wrap that one up and place that out as well, breathing it out. (10 seconds)
10. Finally, bring your attention back inside your body and see if you find that there is a clearer space there. (10 seconds) Welcome this space and allow yourself to rest in it. (10 second PAUSE). This is a time to remember that you are not your problems, even though you have them... you are much larger. (10 second PAUSE). Now see if a word, phrase, image or gesture captures how it feels in the "clearer space". (10 seconds). Say this word or phrase back to yourself and see if it is a good 'fit'. You might want to spend a little time with it, just as it comes there for you. (PAUSE 10 seconds)
11. When you are ready, please turn your attention to the class that is about to begin. (PAUSE 5 seconds). See if you can find an intention for yourself in relation to this class — perhaps something you want to either learn or share, or a question

you may have. When you are ready, slowly and gently bring yourself back into the room. You might want to stretch as you are coming back. (PAUSE). If it feels right, you might want to look around the room and make some eye contact with others, to make sure you are fully back.

centered, and more clear about their intention for coming to class. Whether done as a whole class, or in pairs, Clearing a Space often brings both physiological and psychological relief. We come to realize that while we often have issues that are weighing on us, we can tag them and place them aside. In observing the issues or stressors from a safe distance, we become aware that we are not our problems. When we enter the ‘cleared space’, we can experience that essential part of ourselves that is separate from our problems, and uncontaminated by them. This fresh connection to an unburdened, larger self typically creates a sense of inner calm or peace.

With practice, over time, Clearing a Space becomes a stress reduction skill that is transferable to a variety of other circumstances the student may face outside of the classroom. In addition to increasing their presence in the classroom, students report utilizing this method for stress reduction when preparing to study, write a paper, give a presentation, or deal with personal problems. It truly becomes a sanctuary—a respite, a place to be still, to recharge, and to remember *who* they really are.

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THE FELT SENSE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY SUPERVISION

Salvador Moreno López

This paper focuses on how to integrate the felt-sense into psychotherapy supervision. I discuss some reasons for doing so and describe some specific ways to use the felt sense in supervision.

Two of the most important ways of using the felt-sense in supervision include first, how the supervisee learns to trust and use his or her own felt-sense to understand the client's experiencing and to guide the interactions between them. Secondly, to illustrate how graduate students who are learning to become psychotherapists can learn to differentiate their personal history and felt-senses from those of the clients — so that the client's story belongs only to the client.

I describe some aspects of my own practice in supervision and present some examples and vignettes to support my reflections and proposals about ways to work with the felt sense in psychotherapy supervision.

Key words: psychotherapy supervision, felt-sense, experiential supervision.

The aim of this article is to share some personal experiences and thoughtful reflections about how to explicitly integrate attention to the felt sense or experiencing (Gendlin, 1962, 1964, 1984, 1996) with psychotherapy supervision sessions, especially with graduate students trained in an interdisciplinary approach to psychotherapy.

We find two important challenges in programs that have such interdisciplinary characteristics. The first regards how to simultaneously master various disciplines such as psychology, sociology and philosophy with experiential therapy. The second addresses how to apply the theories so they become useful tools in the students' psychotherapeutic practice and do not remain only academic references without major impact on their professional practice. In other words, how can we encourage students to integrate the theories as their own — while making sense of them in understanding their clients in psychotherapy — and helping them orient their interactions and attain the sought after changes?

Supervision can be one of those privileged spaces to work on four *points of interaction*: between the *personal and historical characteristics* of the student-psychotherapist, the concrete *relationship with clients*, the *theories* described by different disciplines, and the *explanations* of the process of constructive personal change.

This may be why supervision of clinical practice is valued as an important activity and learning experience of psychotherapists (Lopez, 1998; Madison, 2006). It is considered a means of developing certain skills that improve the professional development of the student-therapist in at least two ways: a) the level of comprehension of the clients in relation

to the problems they are confronting in their life situations; and b) the modes of interacting with them in order to advance the therapeutic objectives.

There are several types of supervision according to the focus of attention they emphasize. Thus, some types of supervision place attention on *the case* at hand; that is to say, they look for understanding of *the client's problem* from a theoretical frame of reference in order to, from this perspective, suggest adequate interventions which can promote certain sought after changes. Alternatively, other supervisions place greater emphasis on the *interventions of the therapist*, on what the client does and says during the sessions, searching for their theoretical basis and the effects generated in the interactions (Lopez, 1998).

THE FELT SENSE AND SUPERVISION

I have developed a supervision methodology based on Gendlin's Focusing techniques that focuses attention on *how the psychotherapist takes into account his/her own felt sense in order to*:

1. capture and understand the experiencing — and the lived experience — of the client
2. orient the styles of interaction with the client in such a way that a process of constructive change is favorably encouraged
3. value what goes on in the client with these modes of interaction

Capturing and comprehending the client's experiencing seems like a way of referring to something that we might call *body empathy* (Moreno, 1998). That means the possibility of feeling in our own body a sensation that is similar to what the other is feeling in a given moment of the process, and from this place comprehend the lived experience of the other person. This can be verified through a description of what the psychotherapist feels in the moment and asking the client if this make sense. "How did you know?" many clients have asked on innumerable occasions. After that, they continue describing such a felt sense and expressing themselves from there — and from the new feelings and senses that later appear.

Allowing ourselves to feel — bodily and emotionally — whatever it is we are feeling as psychotherapists during the sessions is what I call *keeping experiential company* with the client. This is necessary in order to capture and comprehend the experiencing of the client in the modality of body empathy.

Once the psychotherapist captures the experiencing of the client and resonates with it, the therapist offers sounds, words, or gestures that express and may carry forward the client's felt sense. The therapist might follow this with a calm waiting that somehow says, "I am still here by your side, interested in you and wanting to understand you."

Sometimes, for student-psychotherapists, what comes from their own experiencing may appear unrelated to the client — or worse, feel completely *foreign*. Even for an experienced psychotherapist, there are moments where we don't always trust what seems to be

coming from our own experiencing in relation to the therapeutic process. I believe that it is important to first discern our own felt senses, then carefully see how our initial felt-instincts ‘fit’ in relationship to what the client is saying.

Even then, with all the experience that a therapist may have, I feel that it is necessary to verify how the client *receives* our expression, i.e. whether it makes sense and helps him/her in recognizing the experiencing to symbolize it with precision. Occasionally, we will have to be more precise or put something aside that we have said because, in that moment, it makes no sense to the client from their felt sense.

The student-therapist also needs to be aware of the ongoing relationship: Does the client feel sufficiently heard, respected and safe enough to open up to the therapist and reveal new aspects of him/her self? Further, the student-therapist needs to be constantly aware of two ongoing levels of interaction: *outer* (relationship of client to therapist), *inner* (relationship of client to his/her own experiencing). Learning how to evaluate the above requires objectivity in order to notice the forward constructive movement of the client’s process and progress.

Further, Gendlin’s process of listening, sensing, hearing, reflecting, and empathy help take into account the multiple levels of felt-sensing that occurs in the process of supervision: the supervisor’s felt-sense/experience of the trainee; the trainees felt-sense/experience of BOTH the supervisor AND client, then of course, the client’s multiple feelings of the therapy process — both relational and intrapsychic. Supervision is indeed a complex process.

Occasionally, therapists-in-training lack clarity and awareness regarding their own authentic feelings during the session with the client. For example, they may not be aware that there exists within them fear, anger, or non-verbal bodily expressions that they would prefer not to reveal to the client. I have frequently found this with Mexican graduate students who are in the process of becoming psychotherapists. When a supervisor listens with attention to a student’s case, two possibilities might occur regarding the bodily felt-sense: one is capturing *what the student is feeling* regarding the client (then I can say something that may help in recognizing these feelings or how s/he is positioning him/her self in the relationship); the other is that I can also point out something about *how the client might have felt* in the situation that the student/therapist is explaining to me. The Focusing principles and ‘attitude’ give the supervisor valuable tools in the process of supervision that better help us to understand the trainee (as well as the client) and support his/her process.

Gendlin elaborates in several writings (Gendlin 1964, 1984, 1996) the need to generate a process that emphasizes the importance of the interpersonal relationship, i.e. the interaction between the flow of experiencing of the client, within the framework of respect and understanding. One of the goals of supervision is to help the trainees learn how to find precise ways of symbolizing their experience.

SUPERVISION AND THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Within the context of supervision (which is part of a learning process to become a psychotherapist), we can include some learning tasks in addition to those already mentioned.

STUDENTS NEED TO:

1. increase certainty that they are paying attention to and recognizing their own felt-sense
2. recognize when interactions appear to arise from — and be guided by their felt sense
3. have enough confidence to modify or make any necessary changes if the client's response indicates that a reflection has been expressed incorrectly

HELPFUL THINGS THE SUPERVISOR CAN ASK THE STUDENT-PSYCHOTHERAPIST TO DO:

1. Narrate the session as s/he recalls it.
2. Read aloud the in-session notes from the client/therapist exchange.
3. Describe any aspects of the session that were difficult to deal with or understand.
4. Bring a tape recording of the session into supervision.
5. Imagine/sense the client during the supervision session.

These are some of the ways to initially bring the session into supervision (Moreno, 1998). However, the important thing is that we (as supervisors) *direct our attention to what the student is feeling* (as s/he describes the experience of the psychotherapy session). The supervisor needs to verify whether the supervisee is *recognizing, experiencing, and expressing* him/herself from the *felt-sense*.

The students frequently have two main important concerns. One is to identify rapidly which data best describes the client's problem; the other is knowing what to do to help the client solve the issue. An additional element that is sometimes present regards the student's hope that the client will notice that changes are due to the trainee's interventions, (wishing to appear competent in the eyes of the client). It is important to point out, however, that within the socio-cultural context of many of the students with whom I have worked, the hope is that the effective help comes through precise explanations of the problem, followed by corresponding guides to action or suggestions. It seems that the *value* of comprehensive listening is very low. 'Just listening' seems (to some new students) to be practically doing nothing. This belief may be one of the first obstacles encountered by students. They must be supported to fully understand the theory behind experiential listening considering that they put a lot of pressure on themselves to try to quickly 'solve the problem', believing that they are wasting time listening — not yet fully understanding the significance of the *meaning* a situation has for a client.

As the student-therapist presents a session (in any modality), the supervisor is attending to his or her own felt experience — trying to get a 'feel' for the trainee, as well as the case. The supervisor also observes and comments on how the trainee attends to his or her own felt-sense of the session. After a period of dialogue and listening, we may find ourselves in an interaction, such as the following:

(Note: S refers to the supervisor. ST refers to student-therapist)

- S: And all that you are saying... see how that feels inside?... how that resonates in you? [Invitation to pay attention to the felt sense]
- ST: Fine! No problem... [As the supervisor, I feel that his answer is not coming from a felt sense]
- S: It feels fine... [resonating with a tone that barely insinuates a question]
- ST: Well... maybe there is a bit of tension here [pointing to the stomach region]... I may have been a bit scared... because I did not understand... I was uneasy... I could not capture what she was feeling...
- S: A certain tension... scared... asking yourself what she really felt... [said slowly]
- ST: Yes, maybe there is something similar to what I lived with my family, and therefore I am not so sure if what I feel comes from her... or only has to do with me. [He is not sure whether the felt sense he identifies is related to him or to the client.]
- S: While listening, you relive, in a way, experiences within your own family. Feelings come which are familiar to you, and so you are not sure if she also feels something similar in her own experience. [Attempts to help the student recognize the confusion and insecurity he feels in not being able to differentiate with precision his own experiencing from that of the client.]
- ST: Well, I do believe she feels it, but it is very difficult for me to just stay with that... I start remembering... and I get confused... I feel... I feel sad and feel like crying...
- S: And then you cannot listen to her, because your own feelings grab your full attention? [Points towards recognizing whether the supervisee captures something of the client that is mixed with his experiences.]
- ST: Yes... maybe I have to talk about this in my own therapy... [The supervisee recognizes an action step that can help distinguish his own experiencing from that of the client.]

In some moment within the interaction, the supervisor thought that the student was not paying enough attention to his experiencing, and was therefore not aware of other feelings he was having during the interaction with his client. This is why the supervisor invites the student to pay attention to the 'direct referent' (Gendlin, 1962, 1964). Upon first answering, the supervisee responds at the same level from which he had been speaking. It is only after the second set of comments from the supervisor — which carried an insinuated question that invited him to verify whether everything was really fine — that the supervisee pays attention to his felt sense and begins to discover a number of feelings that were previously unrecognized.

I emphasize in this vignette a frequent issue of supervision: the confusion, the fear, and the uncertainty of the person being supervised. Commonly, s/he does not feel sure if those feelings and felt senses have to do with his/her own history, with the client's particular

circumstances, or perhaps with what is going on in the interaction. One of the expected outcomes of successful supervision is that the student learns to distinguish these differences.

Notice how different purposes, objectives, and aspects are woven together during the dialogues in the supervision sessions. Maintaining a clear sense of the direction regarding the specific aspects that need attending to, plus the new learnings that we wish to promote, I use what comes up in each session to advance the *recognition of the felt sense* — both as a means of understanding the client and the trainee — and to differentiate the process of making a place to experience the processes of interaction in psychotherapy.

A CASE EXAMPLE

I now present a fragment of a supervision session in which several facets of our work are illustrated. For the student-therapist:

- learning to pay more attention to the felt sense of the client
- recognizing the importance of adding the experiential component (paying attention to the felt sense)
- recognizing that a therapist can learn a lot more about a client (by adding Focusing pieces) than by staying only with the data in a thinking way
- developing trust in one's own felt sense, in order to have meaningful interactions with clients
- learning how to differentiate between the therapist's personal experience and the experience of the client

In this supervision session, we are dealing with a client that the supervisee has been seeing for one year. The woman is a single, 38 year old professional. She seems to have low self-esteem, is dissatisfied with her life situation, carries excess weight (which makes her feel fat and ugly), has a strong desire to meet a partner who loves her — and — at the same time believes this is not possible. At times, she acts seductively in an attempt to find a sexual relationship with a man. If she feels that she has been treated well, she begins to imagine that she has found the love of her life — without recognizing that it was simply a casual relationship. If the man no longer wishes to see her, she feels depressed and abandoned. The relationship with her parents has been conflictual since she was a child, especially with her mother. In this context, the supervisee narrates the session of the previous week.

ST: Suddenly she started saying, “Well, yes, with my Mom, it is easy to know what she doesn't like. She hates fat women. For her, there are two types of people: fat ones, which she hates, and all the rest”.

And then she began to say... “but *something felt* came to me...”

This is when I struggle with myself, because I don't know if it is an interpretation, and I said... I felt like saying, “Ah, and haven't you gained weight to keep her far away? True?”

[Here the student-therapist is inspired to make an ‘interpretation’ that appears to come from his comprehension — both intellectual and felt — of the relationship between the client and her mother, then offer it to the client.]

Because it was a struggle, for two years she has weighed... I don’t know, 90 kilos, or 80... something, I don’t know... and she sat with that for awhile... getting a feel for it... then from that felt part came:

Client: “Well, I am not sure, maybe... but I do know why I don’t want children. When I was an adolescent, I once had a problem with my mother, an experience with her... when she told me that I shouldn’t even be here because she had wanted to abort me... she did not want to have me. And even though we have had interactions during which she cried...”

ST: She was saying this in such a calm manner...

[The student-therapist had hoped that there were other feelings; he feels disconcerted and decides to verify his own instincts with the following intervention; he invites the client to pay attention to her felt sense].

[From here arose the first instinct to ask] “And... maybe see what your body-sense is... of your mother saying something like this to you?”

Client: “Yes, she was telling me she did not want to have me, that she wanted to abort me, and as a consequence of her not wanting to have me, God punished her and took from her what she most had loved in her life, which was her father. God took her father as a consequence of that because her father died”...

ST: And then, I don’t know what we continued to talk about but again came the question, “And how does that make you feel... that your mother would tell you that she did not want to have you, and that as a consequence of not wanting to have you God punished her and took what she had most loved in her life, her father?”

And she said, “*No! No, it doesn’t do anything to me... I don’t feel anything*”, and I was surprised because my feelings seemed so true; sometimes... you can sense when sensations and emotions are forming for another person, and this time it was like that — so very clear, yet she is saying, “*Nothing is happening to me. It didn’t bother me then, and it doesn’t bother me now*”.

[The student-therapist continues to be surprised that the client is not expressing the many feelings he was hoping she would have regarding the incident with the mother. The supervisor believes that the supervisee is reacting from his felt sense — but that he is not clear about that.]

S: That is what she was saying?

ST: *Feeling!*

S: Now let’s see what is it that *you* experienced... during this entire narrative of hers... See if you can remember... did you have a felt sense? [The supervisor invites the supervisee to attend to his felt sense in order to clarify from here what he is capturing and feeling regarding the client and her story.]

ST: No! What surprised me most was that this time *I felt* that she really wasn't feeling anything. [It appeared to the student-therapist that the client really was not feeling anything; nevertheless, he felt that there was something odd that he could not quite name.]

S: Ah! Okay.

ST: And I thought for a while... Is this what Gendlin means by *repressed contents*, *blocks*, all that? [The trainee is trying to find an explanation for what he perceives that disturbs him.] Because *then* she went on to say...

Client: "Once I came home late from school, a bit after 2 p.m., and she... my mother... thought that I had gone to play with my friends, but I had actually stayed for an exam, and she grabbed me and belted me on the back, on my body, and she kept hitting me all around the house until the buckle fell off and then she stopped".

ST: But she did not tell me about how much this hurt or anything... hmmm... [The trainee seemed to be asking himself with some unease... "*And didn't this hurt you...?*"]

Client: "And from there I went away, very insulted, and then my sister told me that my mother had ripped up all my "rock & roll" posters".

ST: And I'm thinking, "This woman's mother is crazy"... not that my client is crazy... she's alright, and I began to ask myself, "How could she possibly want to marry, to have children, after this?" Nevertheless, my greatest surprise was that she was really looking directly into my eyes and saying very clearly: "*I do not feel anything about what my mother said to me about her wanting to abort me, and that her whole life was ruined because she got pregnant with my first sister, and she had to marry my father, and then she had us other five, and her life would have been happier if she had not had all of us, bla, bla, bla...*"

[The trainee emphasizes his surprise when he notices the discrepancy between the incident with the mother and what the client says she is feeling. How is it possible that she is feeling nothing? Nevertheless, the therapist clearly does not know what to do with the discrepancy he perceives.]

S: Let's see, if we pause... if you can recapture that piece where she is talking to you about all this. Try to imagine her, remember her, and all that she said... and now notice yourself... you... How are you feeling while you are there listening to her, watching her recreate this whole story?

[The supervisor has the impression that the supervisee is telling the story of what happened in the therapy session, but *he is not paying enough attention* to what he is *now feeling* in the supervision session, so he invites him to pause and imagine the client as a way to attend to what is now felt during supervision.]

ST: Yes, what was most noteworthy for me as a person, as a therapist, was the discovery of... *it is new for me this time...* feeling clearly that there really was no emotion behind something that was so strong... that happened... that a mother could have said that to an adolescent.

[He perceives with clarity that the client appears to not experience any emotion or feeling regarding what happened with her mother — but — what to do with this perception? It appears to me to be a common situation in the process of learning: the difficulty of staying with the uncertainty — without having to do anything quickly to resolve it.]

S: Is that what you remember feeling in the session? [The supervisor tries to clarify whether the supervisee is talking from his recollection of the therapy session, or whether he is expressing himself from what he now feeling in supervision.]

ST: Yes, in the session I really felt that she was not connected to the feelings of that event. I was so surprised and yet did not insist because I was... [Now he seems to be speaking about what he remembers of the therapy session]

S: Ah! Okay, your appreciation was: “It appears to me that she is not able to recognize what she really feels about what happened”. [The supervisor expresses his understanding of what the therapist perceived. At the same time, he hopes to clarify that they are referring to a *memory* of the therapy session.]

ST: Exactly!

S: It’s not that she doesn’t feel *anything* — it is rather that “I believe she is not *letting herself feel* what in fact she *does feel*...!” [This comment by the supervisor helps the supervisee recognize the uneasy discrepancy that he is feeling.]

ST: Yes, my sense is, “*Is she really telling me that she doesn’t feel anything about this event?*” [The tone seems to express disbelief.]

S: Now, if we bring this here to the present... in the moment... imagine, remember... as if you are there... in order to imagine it again... What is happening to *you*? How are *you feeling*? [The question could be, “How do you feel now in relationship to this client?” The invitation is to go further than the facts, in order to recapture what the trainee knows from his own felt sense.]

ST: (sighs) Let’s see... I felt... hmmm... suddenly like saying, “Alright, here could be the root or the origin of all of it... or a good part of it... the emotional problems.” And a bit like... here was the opportunity to try to feel some of her feelings, right? This was the important part... However, I also felt that I had to wait, because I was also seeing something new in her... which is... that some events were so strong for her that they don’t presently have any emotional impact... even a small inkling of something felt... and the other sense was of surprise that... something this strong in fact, did not awaken any emotion in her. This is how I now recall what I was feeling then. I am not sure if I have answered you.

S: Let’s say there is a mixture of unease and surprise...

ST: Surprise and discovery, right? What I mean by discovery is, “Ah. OK. This is what some authors refer to when they talk about blocked or repressed contents.”

S: It is like making the reference and trying to understand it from a theoretical perspective.

ST: Yes... because it *was* different from other times when you want to ask: “And how does that feel?” And you get a response, “Well, in the middle of all this I felt...” and the client might describe any number of feelings, but in this case — *nothing!* I was already used to the former, which is what had happened with other clients...

[The trainee appeared to be so disconcerted that he was trying to understand in some way what he was perceiving. One of his favorite options up until now was to search for theoretical references for difficulties in attending to his felt sense — which he is slowly overcoming. At the same time he is considering past experiences to appreciate the reaction of the client, and he is also considering what is different from what he expected which is causing his unease. One interesting aspect is that from the theoretical perspective he could present a hypothesis that perhaps *she does feel more* than she is recognizing, and that he can help her wait for the process to unfold, in order to see what happens.]

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED BY THE SUPERVISEE

Upon completing the supervision session, we spoke about what new learning and insights came about in the session. What follows are comments from the student-therapist:

I believe this session taught me the following:

- A re-creation of the felt sense of what happened yesterday in the therapy session helped to increase my understanding of the issue. I became aware of more aspects regarding how the person *lives* that situation.
- I came to understand the importance of paying attention to what *I am experiencing* during the session.
- I am reminded of how crucial it is to pay attention to *my felt sense* in order to use it as a point of reference in reflecting back to the client.
- I believe I can now dare, during a session, to express myself more from the felt sense — which I am so much more aware of now — even if it has to do with something implicit in the expressions of the client.
- I have to give more credibility to the felt sense, validate it more; trust it in a very real way.
- I see the importance of using the exact words of the other person — not putting so much importance on my own words.
- I can pay attention and validate my own images — when they come from my felt sense.
- I can also learn to distinguish whether what comes in me is a genuine felt sense or an interpretation or rationalization. It takes time... a pause... to process a felt sense.
- I realize that when I can identify the changes in my own felt sense, I need to remember that if something changes for the client. It is indeed because of things that I properly reflected back — that helped it to change!

My one comment was to remind him that the felt sense can be symbolized precisely — in very diverse ways. Personally, I often get images that tend to describe the richness and complexity of situations lived by clients. I have found it quite useful to share these images with them because they recognize and resonate with such images, thereby carrying forward their own felt sense.

CONCLUSIONS

Undertaking this writing has increased my awareness of the complexity of the supervision process. Reflecting upon various aspects of supervisory sessions, including reading case transcripts, has taught me much. In my experience as a professor involved in training psychotherapists with an interdisciplinary approach, I see the importance of taking into account the multidimensional aspects of this training: having a place for the bodily felt sense, the affective, the cognitive, and values that include socio-cultural aspects.

Understanding the fullness of Gendlin's work, especially in the process of supervision, requires dialogue and reflection in order to genuinely grasp both the psychotherapeutic process — and the theory behind it — especially for improving interaction and competency in psychotherapy.

I am very clear about how rich it is to explicitly integrate the felt sense, both experientially and conceptually into the supervision of psychotherapists in formation, further supporting their understanding from their own lived experience, of the concepts and theories proposed by Gendlin.

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SING FOCUSING AND SYSTEMS! *we-ing*: Focusing-oriented Family Bonding Therapy

Dave Young, LCSW

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 is felt from inside.

— Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, 1978 (p. 76), 1981, rev. ed. (p. 77)

So we and Focusing are systems! In Focusing, we experience what Gene, here *sings*: *felt-sensing* systems — that’s who we *are* and how we’re *becoming*.

This paper gives a brief introduction to *we-ing*. *we-ing* is a Focusing-oriented family/systems therapy model that expands Focusing. By Focusing, I mean *felt-sensing* to welcome and encourage the healing (developing, evolving, integrating, building, creating, ...) *processings* that occur naturally *within/among* us all. The first sections, through “What is Bonding?”, can help with individual Focusing. After that, the paper concentrates on family/systems therapy.

Standard Focusing, even *we*-Focusings such as Focusing partners and Interpersonal Focusing, understandably and beautifully concentrate more on *felt-sensing* individually *within*. Standard *we*-Focusings use various turns-takings: you help me Focus or you Listen to me, then I help you Focus or I Listen to you. *we-ing* concentrates on *felt-sensing among*. *among* means the physical “interacting first” (or “bonding first”), with the couple/family as one whole. Individual turns-taking often emerges in *we-ing*. But even there, concentration is not first on *me*, i.e., building up enough “ego strength” to be able to handle a *we*. *we-ing* concentrates first on the family-whole and *among* processing, even in “individual” sessions. And family-wholes are never merely wholes. Families are always bonding-wholes — good bonding or bad. So *we-ing* and family therapy are always bonding.

We start with a working definition of Focusing systems and move to a deeper and more precise Focusing understanding and experience of *we-ing*’s “bonding womb”. This leads us to an expansion of traditional Focusing that allows therapists to better interact, in *among* Focusing ways, *with/within* the family as a bonding-whole. From there, we take up a case example, showing a bonding *stopped-processing*. *stopped-processing* — Gene’s concept from *A Process Model* — is crucial to truthfully *understanding*, realistically *felt-sensing* and effectively *responding* to hurting families. We continue with the case example, giving peeks and tastes of some *we-ing*, Focusing *understandings* and interventions.

In this paper, the words in italics, e.g., *sings*, points to a more-than-logical meaning. Singing the notes isn’t *singing the music*. *italics* highlights a deeper, more felt-sense-y *processing*.

What Are Focusing Systems? My working definition includes Gene's idea of many places, many times, many people and *more* — all felt *inside* as a whole. *we-ing* is also living systems, the *inside/outside* “interacting first” that starts *A Process Model* with a bang: “Body and environment are one!” *we-ing* is family systems — the family as a living whole. And all *we-ing*, all families live and embody bondings. Families *are* their on-going bondings, their special, deeply felt, inter-relating *valuing* and *meaning*, especially their *valuing* and *meaning* of each member and of the family as a whole.

***we-ing*: The Bonding Womb.** “As human beings, of course, we begin with human experience” (Gendlin 1997, p. 106). And the “experience” where we humans begin, and in which we primarily live is *with*-others, hopefully *with*-loving-others — our “family”, our bonded *we-ing*.

In this paper, I use intense examples, often personal. A Focusing family therapist *joins* the family's *we-ing*, meaning the therapist *joins* the family's bonding. Without allowing yourself to empathically bond with the family, not only will you fundamentally *mis-felt-sense* and *mis-understand* the family, you'll also not generate the trust needed for change. And by “not-bonding”, by staying “out-of-it” and “observing”, you might reinforce trauma bondings. At the least, you'll almost certainly reinforce their defensiveness. Families must sense that you're *with*-them, that you care with an *inside understanding* and *caring*.

So one requirement of *we-ing* therapy is to become exquisitely familiar with your own bondings — explicitly, behaviorally, and by *felt-sensing*. Without that, you'll also risk *mis-felt-sensing* and *mis-understanding* the family's bonding. And your intervening *within* their/your *we-ing* may be more about healing your own bonding history and bonding present than about healing the family's bonding.

Therefore, especially when I give personal examples, please take a moment to identify your own similar experiences. Allow your *felt-sensing* of “all that” to develop; test/discover my terms *within* your own experiencing. Then you'll not only have more than just my experience of these terms to *understand*, *felt-sense* and *respond* out of, you'll also have a good start on *understanding* and *felt-sensing* your own bonding history. In the case example, allow yourself to *felt-sense join* what this family has experienced/is experiencing. And be on the *felt-sense* “look-out” for your own bonding history coloring it. That, of course, happens — what Gene calls *crossing* (See, for example, Gendlin 1995). *crossing* is basic to how we live, including such vital and healing processes as empathy. And still, you must also be continually aware of your bonding's coloring. So with all examples, please take the time to do your own deep *felt-sensing* — it's crucial.

To better understand *we-ing*, let's take two closely related aspects of *A Process Model* concepts: “interacting first” and “-ing”. Briefly, “interacting first” means “first” isn't objects — me here, you over there — we perceive each other, and then we interact. Rather, first is our interacting, or as I put it, our *we-ing*. “-ing” means objects aren't fundamental; objects aren't what is interacting. Mainly, there is on-going *processing*. So with “interacting first” and “-ing” together, first isn't you and me, first is our *we-ing*. And our *we-ing* births our *me-ings*. In a way, for humans, interacting is not first, because we have no mere interactings. For humans, first is bonding.

For example, 18 months ago, my wife, Jane, slipped on ice and fell some 15 feet off our cabin's deck. She sustained a serious Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). In two terrifying days, her brain-bleeding increased, and Jane descended into almost total non-responsiveness, staying there another two days. The brutal reality is that as Jane left, much of our *we-ing* left, and with that, much of my *me-ing* left, too, leaving me feeling hollowed out, gutted. Anyone who has experienced something at all similar knows this. They will have deeply embodied this truth, a felt memory that is lifelong.

On the fourth day, I was in Intensive Care, talking with Jane and holding her hand. She gave my hand her signature double-squeeze. With that, our *we-ing* flooded back, and out of that, more of my *me-ing* flooded back, too.

This blares out the differences between *we-ing* and a casual *togethering*, like standing in line at the supermarket. Generally, little *me-ing's* emerge out of my supermarket *togethering*. What are these vast, oceanic differences? Bonding.

What is Bonding? Through this example, especially if you're *felt-sensing* your own related experiences, you live several of bonding's key aspects.

Bonding is deeply felt and deeply meaningful. Since *we-ing* is always bonding, *we-ing* is always deeply felt and deeply meaningful. Another aspect: lots of *me-ing* flows out of (or is blocked by) a bonded *we-ing*, as opposed to a lesser *togethering*. In Jane's and my *we-ing*, *with-Jane* non-responsive, lots of my *me-ing* was gone. I was also pouring much *we-ing* into Jane, and I firmly believe our deeply-felt *we-ing* was *calling* Jane back. And from *within* the *calling* of our *we-ing*, Jane took her needed *me-ing*. Also from *within* our *we-ing's* *calling*, Jane sensed my need, my *me-ing-toward-her*.

To continue this story, when my stepson, my stepdaughter, and I left late Saturday night, on the second day after her fall, the most recent brain scan showed Jane's hematoma (brain-bleeding) still increasing. That's when she descended into near non-responsiveness. Clearly, the doctors were preparing us for her death. Indeed, when I arrived alone, early the next morning, the trauma surgeon met with me about terminating Jane's life support. I deferred, saying it was too early, and anyway I needed to talk with my stepchildren — this would be *our* decision, to be made only if and when we were all ready.

Afterwards, I sat with Jane, just us, our *we-ing*, and I spoke to her out of *felt-sensing* my pain, my deepest need. Among many things, I told her what she meant to me, and how I wasn't ready for her to die. Jane didn't stir. Regardless, inside and out, I *felt-sensed* Jane there — maybe I had to. And at least I *felt-sensed* our *we-ing* there, as I said to Jane, "My life is always our life." I spoke to her, censoring nothing — no thoughts, no voice tone, no tears. I *called-from* the truth and reality of my *embodied-remembering* of our *we-ing*, *crossed-with* the truth and reality of our present *we-ing* — very much from Gene's "here and other places, now and other times", as well as from our *we-ing* of "you and other people".

The rest of the day I spent around Jane, often talking, always touching, and from a *we-ing* that *felt-sensed* what I'd said, what we'd lived, what I wanted to keep living.

Several weeks later, after Jane had begun her long and still continuing return, a dear, dear friend — another social worker therapist — told me of his own experience that morn-

ing. Arun was raised in India, and he practices many of their spiritual traditions, developing sensitivities and skills far beyond me. As he was meditating that Sunday morning, holding all that was happening to us, he suddenly felt Jane, and he felt, as he put it, the moment of her decision not to die, but to come back and live.

In many ways, bonded *we-ing* births *me-ing*.

Does this mean that my *me-ing* is only *we-ing*, that my *me-ing* is reduced to a product or even a by-product of *we-ing*? Have we sneaked back into a determinism, where I am only the patterning of my culture, my behavioral conditioning, my early experiences, or here, my bonded *we-ing*?

Obviously, this would not be Focusing-oriented or any kind of client-centered process. But how can an idea, even one we deeply *felt-sense*, like “bonded *we-ing* births *me-ing*”, not mean this?

Bonded *we-ing* no more controls *me-ing* than a mother giving birth to a child, out of their biological (and *more*) *we-ing* pregnancy, controls the child. Reductionist determinism of any kind always fundamentally misunderstands *we-ing*, *me-ing* and bonding, just as it always fundamentally misunderstands Focusing and all living systems.¹

To take us further *into* bonding, let me tell you some of my early bonding stories.

I’m the oldest child of a mother who was adopted and who had grown up as an only child. Embodying *we-ing*, or even simple touch was hard for her. Also hard for her, initially, were boys and babies. A year after my birth, my first sister arrived. I suspect, knowing my dad and knowing my mom’s parents, my maternal grandparents weren’t much able to help mom.

My earliest memory, which I discovered in deep Focusing, is as an infant. I am being held by mom, but I can’t *feel-her-holding-me* in her hands, I can’t *see-her-seeing-me*. In other words, I can’t see/feel our *we-ing*. I am terrified; I feel as if I could be dropped at any moment, and I am helpless to stop it. All because our *we-ing* is constricted and largely blocked, or as Gene says, our *we-ing* was *stopped-processing*. I remember my mother telling me a story of how, when she was pregnant with me, she hated it, because she felt so out-of-control. She also said our pregnancy seemed extremely uncomfortable to her parents. They tried to ignore our pregnancy. This and *more* feels deeply true in my *felt-sensing* and other *embodyings*. It is given even more power by my having treated children who suffered bonding traumas in utero. As a fetus and an infant, what *me-ing* was birthing our *we-ing*? What bonding was I living out-of?

Luckily, blessedly, my next-door neighbor was my paternal grandmother. She had raised three sons, and had grown up loving and close to her two brothers. In the way of those times, she helped raise them, too. Early on, I migrated to grandma as my primary bonded *we-ing*. My dad told me a story about when I was in diapers, early on cold winter mornings, he and my mom, still in bed, would hear the door slam, and they would know I was on my way over to grandma’s.

My deepest *felt-sensed* bonding is my *we-ing with-grandma*. Three memories emerge: First, her *seeing* me, *holding* me with her smiling love and her twinkling eyes — our *we-ing*

out of which still flows much of my *me-ing* and which I can always *touch*. Second is *woo-ing* — she is looking at me, holding my hands and *we're* twirling, swinging around in a circle, while she cries, “*Wooooooooo!*” My feet free of the earth, my self safely grounded in her loving hands and smiling eyes, *we're* flowing and laughing. Third is loving food — many smells and short movies. The smell-sight-feel of oatmeal cookies cooling on the rack on her old cherry dining room table. (I use that table for my work desk.) Bubbling stew on an old high-legged stove, under which the mama cat always had kittens. Her making me “he-man” sandwiches, filled with bright chipped beef, yellow cheddar cheese, white-white mayonnaise and bread, dark green leaf lettuce fresh from her garden, with a tang of vinegar and salt. I remember so much of our *we-ing* around food — our smiling, loving, inter-giving delight. Later, my parents talked of grandma raising a family during the Great Depression, grandpa being without steady work for years. She couldn't feed her family as she wanted. They smoked carp from the river, borrowed field corn to grind in the coffee-grinder for bread, ate greasy dog-caught woodchuck for Sunday dinner. My father remembered, as a child, that there was never enough of anything that tasted good. And he remembered grandma knowing there was never enough — their *we-ing* in poverty.

What do we learn of bonding here? Bonding isn't just luck-of-the-draw. At an early Focusing International Conference, Gene said, “Thinking a child comes as a blank slate isn't just a little bit wrong. It's all wrong. The child comes knowing there should be milk and warmth and loving and *more*.”

My first-bonding with mom — we knew this wasn't right. When I found a much more right bonding with grandma, I went there, with mom letting me. And mom learned from our *we-ing*, and she grew into much better *we-ing* with my sisters and my brother, by my memory and by family stories. Also by my memory, our *we-ing* — mom's-and-mine — greatly improved, though it remained much different than her *we-ing* with my sisters and younger brother. Our *we-ing* was more sibling-like; to me she was as a much older, cautious, and loving sister, while I was the feisty and experimenting much younger brother, especially as I grew into teen years and adulthood.

What does this mean? Healthy bonding is *in-born*. No matter how bad the first or early experiences, *something* inside knows how it should be different and better. This *in-born* “something” I call *homing*. *we-ing* is our deepest *homing*, from which *me-ing* comes, and to which *me-ing* returns, again and again, throughout our lives. Gene says, of what I call *within-Focusing*, that every felt sense, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being. That's *homing*. So, too, with all *among-Focusings*, all *we-ings*: every *we-ing*, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being. That, too, is *homing*.

Bonded *we-ing* greatly, enduringly shapes and guides future *we-ings*, *me-ings* and *more...* For example, while Jane was in Intensive Care, and later, for her two months in the hospital, much of our *we-ing* came out of and was sustained by not only *felt-sensed* memories of our *we-ing*, but also by grandma-me *we-ing* and *more*.

That's another vital aspect of bonding — *more*, or as I like to write it, *....* A *....* has been called “the Gendlin ellipses”. I recall Gene once shouting, “No, no, no! Not the Gendlin ellipses! It's always *your* ellipses!” *....* by itself or following a word, e.g., *more....*, is

Gene's "the murky zone" and my "more-than unclarity" (Young 1993). is our physically felt "there", *embodying-opening* and *more* than anything we can say, think or do, *embodying-opening* our life's possibilities and potentials. is our felt sense's *implying*....

So healthy bonding is always *embodying-opening*. Currently, most attachment thinking reduces *we-ing* to defensiveness — seeking-safety/protecting to ensure that genes survive. Yes, bonding creates safety, and sometimes that safety is important. When I feel unsafe, I automatically seek out my most vital *we-ing*. I can feel enormously protective of those with whom I bond. But safety/protectiveness alone will never fully explain my delight in seeing my grandson, Kyle, or the pure joy and rightness of holding him and rocking him to sleep. Those who reduce my delight, joy, and rightness to passing on genes (we're not biologically related) live within cramped and hobbled understandings, alienated, blind to the fuller truths and realities of loving and bonding.

Healthy bonding, like Focusing, is *embodying-opening*. Seeking-safety/protecting may be a temporary stop, en-couraging, en-heartening a return to greater, deeper, farther, *more*.... *embodying-opening*. To cite a classic example, I recall my granddaughter, Kira, after she learned to crawl. Me puttering in the kitchen, my attention elsewhere, Kira would crawl off, exploring. A few moments later, I'd hear slap-thumping, and around the corner she'd come, looking up at me, wide-eyed. I'd smile — How could you not? — gently saying, "Hi." I felt our eyes bonding, and I could sense our *we-ing* birthing more Kira *me-ing*. Refueled, re-enheartened, re-*me-ing* and re-*we-ing*, off she went, *embodying-opening into* more exploring.

So healthy bonding always has a quality similar to felt-shifting — *embodying-opening*. *Embodying* my *we-ing* opens so much more *me-ing*. Anyone in a healthy, loving relationship knows this. This quality, and its absence in unhealthy bonding is not only felt, but easily seen and heard — or — to set aside the primacy of perception in favor of the primacy of interacting first: *-ing*, and *embodying*: Healthy and unhealthy bondings are often immediately *felt-sensed* in any *we-ing*, even in a "read-about" *we-ing*. Hopefully, in my stories of Jane, my mom and grandma, you can *felt-sense* this.

Like *we-ing*, *me-ing* always has a healthy, balancing *in-born homing*. And *we-ings*, while never reducible to separate *me-ings*, always already have, as aspects of their "bonding first", *me-ings*.

Healthy bonding, healthy *we-ing* never "other-dominates" or "other-controls" or even *we-ing-controls* my *me-ing*, because I'm always powerfully in my *we-ing*. Healthy *we-ing* is never just or mostly a kind of "other", though there are others (or other *me-ing* aspects) in *we-ing*, too. I am already in my *we-ings* — my *me-ing* is always *in-there*. Gene, and his great teacher, Richard McKeon, called this "reflexivity". Reflexive is from Latin, meaning to bend back on itself, and a reflexive verb is a verb whose action comes from and also affects the subject — for example, "I'm relaxing". In *we-ing*, this reflexivity means, in my terms, that my *me-ing* is always an aspect of my *we-ing* that also births my *me-ing*. That's why I call it "my" *we-ing*, because this highlights my on-going participation within this *we-ing*.

we-ing affects all within that *we-ing*. For example, in our food-nurturing aspects of our grandma-me *we-ing*, that *we-ing* healed both our *me-ings* — mine from mom-me *we-ing*,

grandma's from her earlier *we-ings* with her other children during the Depression. Me, she could feed. And in feeding me, in that aspect of our *we-ing*, she healed some *we-ing* pain left from her earlier poverty.

Bonded *we-ing* Summary. What have we experienced about bonding? While I list learnings one at a time, giving them separate numbers, they're not ten separate "things" in "bonding", like ten rocks in a box. These are "always-there" aspects of healthy bonding, where each always *implies* and in some ways *is* all the others. These aspects are reflexively interacting — the inter-affecting of one *whole-processing*.

1. Bonding is deeply felt, deeply meaningful *we-ing*.
2. Bonded *we-ing* continually births my *me-ing*.
3. Lots of *me-ing* flows out of a bonded *we-ing*, as opposed to a lesser *togethering*.
4. Healthy bonding is *in-born*, and in some ways, that *in-born* cannot be lost.
5. Every *we-ing*, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being — that's *homing*, which produces felt-rightness and direction.
6. Bonded *we-ing* greatly, enduringly shapes and guides future *we-ings* and *me-ings*.
7. Healthy bonding is always *embodying-opening*, even as it is seeking-safety/protecting.
8. Healthy bonding, healthy *we-ing* never "other-dominates" or "other-controls" my *me-ing* because I am always *in-there*, my *me-ing* is always already affecting my *we-ing*.
9. All *me-ings* are inter-affecting and inter-affected by their *we-ings*. In trusting, healthy bonding, one *me-ing* doesn't chronically seek to other-dominate, other-control, or wall-off.
10. Bonded *we-ing* always has *more* than we can say; healthy bonding always has a lot of creative, responsive, *opening*

All right, so how does Focusing fit into all this bonded *we-ing*, healthy and unhealthy?

Can We Focus *with-Family*? How can we get from our usual Focusing into Focusing family bonding therapy? How can we Focus *with-family*? What could "the body" and "the felt-sense" be? In a family of four, don't we have four different bodies with four or more different felt senses?

How odd, even impossible "family body" and "family felt sense" feel when we *understand*, *felt-sense* and interact within a world built-up from separate objects, where a family is the adding-up of its individual members. Gene calls this units/parts thinking.

Let me rephrase these questions in the *understanding* of systemic *processing* and *wholes*: What is the family *embodying*? How is the family, as a whole, stuck or in *stopped-*

processing or *process-skipping*? How is the whole family triggered into structure-bound, rigidly repeated reactions? How is and isn't the family showing Focusing Attitude or Caring-Feeling Presence? How is and isn't the family Focusing *with-family*? And how can I, the therapist, invite, welcome and further *with-family* Focusing? As a useful analogy, think of "individual" Focusing, where you are facilitating four very strong, very different, very conflicting felt senses within one person, all inter-affecting each other and the person as a whole.

Can you feel possibilities and *openings* here? Ah, but still: how can we do this kind of Focusing?

***we-ing*: Focusing's Four-Way zig-zagging of understanding, felt-sensing, in-the-worlding and homing.** *zig-zagging* is Gene's term for Focusing's back-and-forth between what you think/say/do, (or as I call it) *understanding*, and your felt sense, (or as I call it) *felt-sensing*. Gene also calls *understanding* the rational or logical order — our explicit thinking, saying, doing. Gene calls *felt-sensing* the implicit order. These two *orderings* (I prefer them as *processings*) are very different and vital ways we live, though one is never found without the other. In implicit *ordering* (*felt-sensing*), words, gestures, images, whatever are always *implied*. In rational *ordering* (*understanding*), our *felt-sensing* is always at least potentially there.

zig-zagging between *understanding* and *felt-sensing* is found in all Focusing and TAE (Thinking at the Edge) steps. The steps, themselves, are explicit, logical directions — *understandings* (rational *ordering*) — which we can *zig-zag* to when our *felt-sensing* (implicit *ordering*) is stuck. At each step, we check with our *felt-sensing*. *zig-zagging* between these two *orderings* is how Gene gives us his wonderful "Instructions about not following Instructions" (See, for example, Gendlin 1990b, "Instructions for not following instructions are the essence of Focusing..."). Yes, it is usually wise and helpful to follow the explicit, logical directions (*understandings*). And our *felt-sensing* still might let us know, "Oh, this instruction, even if it is Step 4 in Focusing or Step 3 in TAE — that doesn't feel right to my *felt-sensing*." Then we stop, wait, and let come what does feel right — another, different, "better fitting", "more right" *understanding*. As Gene says, "This process is a 'zig-zag' between what is [felt] implied on one hand, and the statements or actions [or steps] on the other" (Gendlin 2004c).

***in-the-worlding*: we-ing's third Focusing zig-zagging.** To facilitate *with-family we-ing* Focusing, we must add into our *zig-zagging* two more *orderings*. First is what I call *in-the-worlding*. As early as the "Introduction" of *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* (Gendlin 1962), Gene presents this *ordering*, which he names the experimental order — interacting out in the world, with the world extremely active in that interacting. (See, too, for example, "The Responsive Order", Gendlin 1997, and footnote 1 of *A Process Model*, Gendlin 1997). That's when Galileo, rather than only rationally figuring that a cannon ball would/wouldn't fall faster than a small coin, tested it *in-the-worlding*, taking both up to the top of the Tower of Pisa, dropping them and seeing what happened.²

For another, human example of *in-the-worlding*, let's use a Wittgenstein quote from Gene, (*Philosophical Investigations* 286): "If someone has a pain in his hand... one does

not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: One looks into his face” (Gendlin 2004). I may *zig-zag* between my *felt-sensing* and *understanding* to determine whether or not to comfort this person and how to comfort her. But if I want to see whether my comforting is working, I don’t just check my *felt-sensing* or *understanding*. I also check *her*: I look into her face. Now, yes, in looking into her face, I’m also *felt-sensing* and *understanding*. And I’m looking into her face.

Gene doesn’t explicitly include *in-the-worlding ordering* in his Focusing steps *zig-zagging*, though it’s included by memory in TAE *zig-zagging*, where specific instances, specific situations, times when something actually happened, are used to build theory. And Gene certainly uses this in how he does psychotherapy. In a Gene TAE DVD, he talks of demanding of his clients not generalities, but actual specifics. For example,

Client: My husband never cares about me, he never notices me.

Gene: Can you tell me a specific time when he didn’t notice you?

Client: Well it happens all the time.

Gene: Yeah, and I want one specific time.

Client: It happened every day last week. It’s always the same, he never-

Gene: (interrupting) No, no, no: one time I want.

Client: (pausing) Well... yesterday, when he came home from work, he just walked in the door right past me without saying a word, and he went into the kitchen and fixed himself a drink. Then he...

We do this automatically: including *in-the-worlding* in our *zig-zagging*. Anything else would be nuts. But without explicitly adding *in-the-worlding* into our *zig-zagging*, *with-family we-ing* Focusing won’t work. *in-the-worlding*, the actual *embodying* offers our best clues to *understandings* and *felt-sensings*.

I’m often *felt-sensing-understanding* two interacting aspects of what this *we-ing* is *embodying*. First, What *me-ing* is birthing out of this *we-ing*? Second, What Focusing *embodying-opening* is present?

Stopped-processings: from demonstrating *in-the-worlding* to demonstrating the need for another ordering. For example, a 4-month old baby is crying because she’s hungry and because her diapers haven’t been changed, and she also needs holding, coo-ing, rocking, and her mother’s smiling face — their loving *we-ing*. Her mother is depressed and feeling horrible and hopeless about her ability to comfort her child, i.e., about her mothering — mother’s *me-ing* coming out of this *we-ing*. To escape these feelings, to escape her *me-ing* coming out of their vital *we-ing*, mother locks herself into a computer game behind her bedroom’s closed doors. She’s blocking sounds and feelings from her baby and from her, the mother’s *felt-sensing*. After 20 minutes, her baby stops crying. By two more months, at 6 months old, her baby hardly cries at all.

Can you sense the *stopped-processings* here? But as Gene says, in *A Process Model*, there's only one whole interacting — *ev-ving* or everything being inter-affected by and inter-affecting everything else *within* one whole processing. This includes *stopped-processings* (See Gendlin 1997, esp. IVA e). But what happens to these *stopped-processings*?

Gene says, "...the stopped process will continue to be implied." [*felt-sensing*, the implicit *ordering*], and "**The stopped process exists insofar as what does continue is different...** [and] this difference in the ongoing process **carries the stoppage.**" [*in-the-worlding*, the situational *ordering*] (Gendlin 1979/97, p. 18, emphasis: Gene's). With this last sentence, I would say that the on-going *processing* not only *carries* and *shows/sounds* the *stopping*, it also *carries* and *shows/sounds* the on-going *needing* that's stopped or, perhaps more accurately, that's not being fulfilled and in some ways still demands fulfilling...

Using our baby-mother example and concentrating on *in-the-worlding*, the baby's silence isn't "just silence". The baby's "not-crying silence" is different from "contented silence" or "sleepy silence". *in-the-worlding*, you can see these differences in the baby's *embodying*. Of course, the baby's "not-crying silence" isn't first or just "the baby's": it's birthing out of the "interacting first" of the baby's "not-crying silence"/the mother's "not-responding". And the baby's "not-crying silence" isn't just the baby's *embodying*, either. The baby's *me-ing* of "not-crying silence" is birthing out of the baby's/mother's "interacting first", their *we-ing*. And the mother is also *embodying*, out of their *we-ing*, including out of her baby's "not-crying silence". In some ways, then, you can see the baby's "not-crying silence" in how the mother plays the computer game. The baby's *needing* to cry for her mother and the mother's *needing* to respond to her baby continue in these silently screaming *stopped-processings*, which are *embodying* in both baby and mother.

Can you feel, even hunger for that quality, that truth and reality which the word "*needing*", above, highlights? The baby *is-needing* to cry for; the mother *is-needing* to respond to. Our hunger for their *needings* is so basic, so *in-born*, so "must happen to be at all right" that we could not sit there and allow this to go on indefinitely. We could accept many different *in-the-worlding* responses. **But we cannot accept anything we experience as continuing not-crying-for/not-responding-to.** We could also accept many different and complex *felt-sensings* of "all that". **But we cannot accept anything we experience as not-felt-sensing baby's needing to cry for, mother's needing to respond to.** We could accept and need to accept many compassionate and fulsome rational, situationally-based *understandings*. **But we cannot accept anything we experience as not-understanding the continuing *needing* and *moving-toward* baby's crying-for/mother's responding-to, no matter how "reasonably", how "understandably" (given their history) that mother and baby are now caught up in *stopped-processings*.**

homing: the fourth ordering of we-ing zig-zagging. Gene writes in his *Focusing* book, "*Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.... Your body, with its sense of rightness, knows what would feel right.... It knows the direction*" (Gendlin 1978, p. 75; italics: Gene's). This is *homing*, which has a direction that transcends the merely situational and which has a quality of *gifting*, even *gracing* when we *open* ourselves up to it — beyond what we, ourselves, are capable of. *homing*, too, is "caring feeling presence" which Ed McMahon and Pete Campbell

teach so beautifully, by story and example, and about which Ann Weiser Cornell writes so clearly and eloquently. I call *homing* the *with-Being/toward-Being ordering*. *with-Being*, of course, is what I call *presencing*. *toward-Being* is the “direction” which is beyond just the situation.

CASE EXAMPLE

All humans live *in-and-with* bonded *we-ings*. This is especially clear with children. Who they are and how they do their *we-ing* varies greatly from culture to culture, even from family to family. But if within this *we-ing*, as there is persistent and pervasive not-*attuning*, then their *we-ing* becomes more and more cut off from *homing*. (*attuning* is reflexively, continuously and accurately adjusting *me-ings-within-we-ing*, this as experienced through the *orderings* of *felt-sensing*, *understanding*, *in-the-worlding* and *homing*, all within the *giving-receiving* of “interacting first.” With *attuning*, a healthy *homing* at least eventually emerges as *embodying-opening*. *attuning*, of course, is never perfect. But *we-ing* never becomes healthy (healing, whole, developing, evolving, stably building, ...) without *attuning* under the guidance of *homing*.

To demonstrate this, let me introduce William and his mother. Obviously, I have changed some information, but only by substituting from similar clients. All you read below is true. You may think I am giving “too much information.” Actually, I’m giving barely enough. Again, healthy *we-ing* is never observing. To *understand* the various “moves” of this *we-ing* Focusing, you must be able to *felt-sense* your way, to *join* as deeply as possible, the family’s on-going *we-ing*. And with RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder) — William and his mother’s bonding — the past weighs heavily on the present. So knowing that past helps the therapist tentatively *felt-sense*, *understand* and explicate what’s going on, leading *we-ing* into likely or at least possible places until *attuning* and *homing* re-emerge.

William is a curly-haired, freckled bi-racial child with a button nose. Fourteen years old, his long, thin legs have outgrown his upper body, and his voice often cracks. I see him in the waiting room, and he comes into my office, like so many children I see, with a rigid body, a frozen smile and two screaming eyes. His adoptive mother, like so many mothers I see, looks haggard and tense, her eyes much more fearful than hopeful. Neither are *attuning* to me or to each other with anything like *embodying-opening*. My first goal with William and his mother will be my *joining* their *we-ing* in such a way that I can facilitate (invite, welcome, build, encourage, ...) *attuning*, given their obvious distress. Regardless of culture, their painful not-*attuning in-the-worlding* lets me know that they are detached from their *we-ing’s homing*. And thus, the *me-ings* birthing from their *we-ing* are unhealthy and in some vital ways, untrue — an untruth experienced in the *orderings* of *felt-sensing*, *understanding* and *in-the-worlding*.

I recall meeting William and his mother in the waiting room — their *embodying/we-ing screamed*. I felt my stomach scrunching, my neck and shoulders tightening — common signs of my own walling-off “in response to”. I took a few seconds for *presencing-with* my own walling-off, having a good idea of my bonding issues involved, which I *presenced* as well. As I can *be-with* my walling-off and my “all that” behind it, genuinely, so I can

then also *be-with* William and his mother. I can *join* and *attune* to their current walling-off *we-ing*. Believe me, my bonding issues don't need to be "resolved". I just need to *felt-sense* and *understand* them and their *processing*, and I need to be *presencing-with* them. That is enough to allow me to *join* and *attune* to the *now* of their *we-ing*.

William and his mother come into my office and sit down:

Dave: What brings you here today?

William: To get some help.

Dave: Help with what?

William: Lying.

Dave: How is lying a problem?

William: It's caused my mom a lot of stress.

Mother: It's caused a lot of pain between the both of us, which has not been the best thing.

Dave: How long as this been going on?

Mother: Twelve years, probably more. We've tried to get help before.

Dave: [turning to William] Has anything helped?

William: Nothing's really helped to get me to stop lying.

Mother: He's tried equine therapy, and he's worked with a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists. And he has problems with stealing and cheating, too.

Mother takes over, telling their *we-ing's* story. William and his two brothers were adopted away from a biological mother who made her living as a prostitute, William being 3 years old, and his older brothers 5 and 6 years old. In all sorts of weather, his bio-mother regularly locked the children out of her trailer while she was working, often leaving them for many hours with little or no food. When they were in the trailer, bio-mother (who was probably quite depressed) ignored them, escaping into drugs, alcohol, computer games and sleep. The trailer was reported filthy, smelling of rotting food and molding soiled diapers. Most of William's contact had been with his older brothers, locked into a fierce competition for food, warm shelter and attention. (Affection was rarely present.) While there were no specifics, sexualized behaviors strongly suggested that the children were at least exposed to bio-mother's johns, and most likely they'd all been molested.

A year before our appointment, William's two older brothers accused their adoptive father of molesting them. William was adamant that they were lying, and he had given details of their anger at their father and of their planning their accusations. An expert on RAD, who testified in Court, believed these accusations were false, providing many specifics. Father steadfastly denied molesting. The judge, however, sentenced father to 10 years in prison, where he is unlikely to receive parole because he refuses to admit molesting.

Adoptive mother and father had already raised a family of four biological children, now grown. Since adoption, they and the three boys had often been in psychotherapy, but to no effect. Only during the trial was RAD discussed. William's mother visited his father twice a week in prison, but William wasn't allowed visitation because his father had not admitted to molesting. Mother and father had a deep Christian faith, conservative, but not fundamentalist, which was how they had been raised.

Take a moment to *be-with* William-and-his-mother, to *join* and *attune* to their *we-ing*. Admittedly, you're getting in a few paragraphs, what I got over, say, fifteen minutes, during which I could *see/hear/felt-sense* a mother filled with barely concealed and highly understandable rage, while William became more and more rigid — eyes still screaming, smile still frozen, speaking little and in short single sentences, if possible, one or two words.

Can you sense the *in-the-worlding*, situational reasons and the *understandings* shaping William's and his mother's *we-ing* and their *embodying*? Can you sense how their *embodying*, their *we-ing* has become tragically detached from the *toward-Being* (beyond situational direction) and *with-Being* (*presencing*) of *homing*?

As their story unfolds, with its litany of bonding pains, what am I, the therapist, doing to facilitate the *we-ing* of *with-family* Focusing? Analogous to individual Focusing, to guiding myself in individual Focusing with highly conflicting and overwhelming felt senses: first, of course, is my own *presencing*. I am fully *attuning* and *embodying-opening* to the *past-storying/present-embodying* of this *we-ing*. Is my *embodying* *grounding* and *holding*? Or are (many?) aspects of my *me-ing* lost within this storied *we-ing*? The often obvious, sometimes subtle physicality's of these different *processings* are well known to experienced Focusers, though they can always surprise us by coming in new forms. If I become aware of my own anxiety or spinning, I know what *me-ing* is birthing from this *we-ing*. I also know what my *embodying* is reflexively feeding into this family's *we-ing*. This may be majorly pushing one of my own bonding hot-buttons; I may be experiencing their — William's and his mother's — longstanding *me-ing* birthing from this *we-ing*; and it may be both.

The problem is not *having* or *felt-sensing* the anxiety or the overwhelmed. With *we-ings* like William and his mother's, if you're not *felt-sensing* something like anxiety, anger, overwhelmed, and the tragedy of all that, you're likely not *joining/attuning*-to the family. This is the second common type of therapist *embodying* problem: *walling-off/dissociating*.

Experienced Focusers know this feel in themselves, again, in ways obvious, subtle and sometimes new. Naturally, you bring *presencing* to this *embodying*, too. And you're also *felt-sensing* and *presencing-with*, as best you can whatever *embodying* is birthing your *walling-off/dissociating*. Here, too, this *we-ing* may have triggered your own bonding hot-button and/or you may be *embodying* this family's *me-ings*. And as it's the latter, your *presencing-with-walling-off* and at least a little *felt-sensing* awareness of the possibilities of what birthed it may, in itself, be vital and healing in their *we-ing*.

I worked with mother individually, nearly twice weekly, for almost two months within a *we-ing*, William-mother context. I had several steps in mind. First, she needed empathy from me to create a *we-ing* about her her-William *we-ing* which could birth a new *me-ing*, so to speak a new *mothering*. Usually folks need empathy before than can give empathy, before

they can truthfully let go into *we-ing*. Second, mother needed my *we-ing* with William, as I reported to her, birthing a new *understanding*, *felt-sensing*, *in-the-worlding* so she could re-claim her *homing* and empathize, accurately and compassionately, with William.

One caution: In badly hurting families where bonding has long been fractured, especially with RAD, normal reflective listening may not only be ineffective, it may actually be harmful. I'm reminded of Marshall Rosenberg dropping by our Hyde Park Changes group, "listening" to an entrenched old-timer who'd been telling the same story, the same way for years. Marshall "listened", but differently, and the old-timer moved some. Afterwards, I asked Marshall what he did:

"Have you noticed," Marshall said, "that when you reflect content, you get more content?"

"Well... sure Marshall," I answered, feeling puzzled.

"And when you reflect feelings, you get more feelings?" I frowned. "Of course."

Marshall fixed me with his intense dark eyes. "Dave, when you reflect an alienated view of the world, you just get more alienation."

That was one of my "Great Learnings". *How* to accurately and empathically "listen" — which is based on *presencing* — without reflecting alienation is tricky and not subject to easy formula. As a start, I'd recommend Marshall's empathy form: "You're feeling because you're needing", found in his latest general book on Non-Violent Communication (Rosenberg 2003). This helps the listener and the person being listened to go a step deeper, one that brings gentle ownership and vulnerability.

Let's skip back to mother and William, who've been back in session together, here, for about two months. William has just revealed physical abuse by his two brothers, starting as early as he could remember and continuing, literally, until the older boys left for foster-care:

Dave: And you never told anyone [I said softly.]

William: No. [William stays looking at his feet, avoiding our eyes, avoiding our *we-ing*. He has enough courage — great courage — to tell, but not enough to see himself in our gaze.]

William: I thought if I told... that they'd hurt me even worse — they told me what they'd do. And... [William stops and swallows] and I figured [mom and dad already knew.

Dave: [I hear mom gasp, and I put up my hand to stop what she was going to say. I turn to mom, my face sad, and say] Mom, can you imagine how awful William must have felt, thinking you and his dad knew about his getting beaten up and not stopping it?

The next ten minutes or so are me coaching mom to give William empathy for all the deep and terrible *felt-sensings* and *understandings* he'd lived, his whole life. Throughout,

William gave little felt-shift sighs and slight nods, letting me know, to some extent, he was *we-ing* Focusing *with*-mom. But I knew that until he could look at his mom and accurately *attune* to her, this *we-ing* birthing his *me-ing* wouldn't heal. Finally, as much of William's body tension releases, this for the first time I've ever seen, I gently ask:

Dave: William?

William: Hmm?

Dave: Can you look at your mom? [Immediately, William's full tension returns. William gives no other response. I give him a minute or so, and still no response.]

William? Is it all right if your mom touches you?

Again, we — his mom and I — give him time and space. After a minute, William nods. William is an extremely courageous boy. By this time, of course, both mom and I have tears.

Dave: Mom? [I ask] Can you move closer to William? [She does; William tenses. I wait a moment, then ask]

William? Are you sure it's all right for mom to touch you? [This time William's nod comes sooner.]

Dave: Mom? [I ask] Could you put your hands on William's shoulders?

She does, with my encouragement rubbing William's shoulders gently — a living, moving touch, and caring as I can see from mom's face and body. I give that time to settle in, as I'd give a deep felt-shift time to settle in. After a minute or so, William gives a felt-shift sigh and his body and face relax. He's still staring down at his feet.

Dave: William? [I ask] Can your mom touch your face?

William's body tension returns, but not full tension. We wait. After a few moments, William nods, and I have mom gently cup his face in her hands. Again, mom's body, face and touch speak empathy. She gently strokes his cheek with her thumbs. Again, we give William time to settle in, as he does with another little felt-shift sigh and relaxing. William is *we-ing* Focusing. Courageously. His body, his self is connecting to his deep *needing*, his *homing*, now, as we take small steps and give him time.

Dave: William? [I ask] Can you let your mom lift your face so you can see her?

I'm surprised there's no return to tension. William is ready. The *homing* within him knows this is the next step. I nod to mom, who slowly, gently raises his face. Mom is still

crying. When William's and mom's eyes meet and become a deeper *we-ing*, William shrinks a little.

Dave: William? [I ask] I feel very respectful of you for saying all you've said, for letting your mom touch you, and for looking at your mom. That takes a lot of courage. Right mom?

Mom, still crying, nods. William remains looking at her, still physically tense. But his eyes are no longer screaming, his face no longer blank and walling off. His eyes are searching, they're trying to *attune*, trying to *we*.

Dave: William? [I ask gently] What do you see your mom feeling?

William: [William's eyebrows scrunch. Finally, uncertainly, he says] Mad?

Dave: Ah... Mad. That makes sense, given all that's happened to you. Right mom?

Mom nods, with even more tears. Gross *mis-attuning* is almost a defining and certainly a reinforcing characteristic of RAD and terribly *mis-attuning* families.

Dave: But you're not sure she's mad? [William shakes his head.] Yeah... it's hard to be sure. What do you see in her eyes?"

William: [William hesitates, then says] Tears?

Dave: That's right. Tears. What feeling do tears often mean?

William [William searches and thinks hard, finally and still tentatively saying] Sad?

Dave: Yes. Sad... Mom, are you feeling sad?

Mom: [Nods, with more tears] Very sad... [she says]

Dave: What are you feeling sad about? [I ask]...

And we begin, once again, the long, slow, gentle *processing* of *attuning*. William and his mother, with small steps, are *embodying-opening* into a more true, more realistic *we-ing* that births more true, more realistic, and much more in-touch with *homing me-ing*.

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ENDNOTES

1. Bonding is always first a whole interacting. As such, we can always start afresh, re-*understanding* it out of different specific experiences and coming up with different, equally valid and, perhaps, even more relevant aspects — at least more relevant to other particular bonding experiences that we are facing. This isn't "just philosophy"; it's vital to Focusing bonding therapy. *we-ing* therapists must always be prepared to re-*understand* specific bondings afresh. We must allow new *understandings* to emerge out of and affect our *felt-sensing* of this family's bonding, should we sense that our previous *understandings* fail to *open* us to this family. Developing this creativity is essential to *we-ing* therapy, just as something similar is essential to Focusing guiding, and to our own *opening* to our individual felt senses.
2. This does **not** give this *ordering* primacy over the other three *orderings*. Rather, as with the other three, this recognizes this new *ordering's* distinct role and its place at the table of our interacting first, our bonded *we-ing*.

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CREATIVE EDGE ORGANIZATIONS

Businesses and Organizations as a “Kind” of Focusing Community

Kathy McGuire, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

After thirty years involvement in starting Listening/Focusing Communities, I searched for present-day contexts where the Focusing Community model of the original Changes group (Chicago, 1969-1975) could “spread like wildfire.” I had a major “epiphany” when I realized that businesses/for-profit and non-profit organizations ARE communities. I began to articulate the model of Creative Edge Organizations, where each individual is engaged at their own Creative Edge, their unique “felt sensing,” while working alone and in groups/teams/meetings, and incorporated Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening as core skills of the PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process. I also developed The Creative Edge Pyramid of seven applications for incorporating Listening/Focusing into the widest variety of situations at home and at work, a form of “human literacy.”

HOW SPREAD LISTENING/FOCUSING “LIKE WILDFIRE”?

In 2006, I came out of retirement to try to figure out how to spread Listening and Focusing, and particularly Focusing Communities, like “wildfire.” I had been involved with Listening/Focusing for over thirty years and yet, still, only a tiny fraction of human beings even knew of these wonderful self-help skills. In that time, the internet, website, blogs, and social networking sites had provided new opportunities for sharing ideas. I began looking at how to use these new avenues to try to get Listening/Focusing into the world — *as core skills of “human literacy”* — as basic and widespread as reading and writing.

Gendlin’s (1981, 1984) six-step Focusing process was developed in the context of the original Changes group in Chicago, (1969-1975). Focusing was taught hand-in-hand with Empathic Listening. Since founding The Focusing Institute in the mid 1970’s, Gendlin has gone on to develop Thinking At The Edge (TAE), the Philosophy of the Implicit, and The Process Model (see www.focusing.org homepage for an introduction to all of these). There has been less emphasis upon developing theory and practice in the area of Focusing Groups and Focusing Communities.

During those early days, I had done my dissertation, with Gendlin as adviser, on “Listening and Interruptions in Task-Oriented Meetings” (Boukydis a.k.a. McGuire, 1975; McGuire, 1977). I had wanted to find a way to stop aggressive, competitive interruptions in group meetings in order to create a Listening and Focusing climate. Problem solvers would have the time, space, and safety for Focusing — to stop quietly, check in with their “whole body sensing” of situations, and articulate new ideas and solutions directly from their present felt experiencing.

I hypothesized that non-interrupted speaking turns would allow workers to express their own needs, their own negative reactions or hesitations, their own creative ideas and also really hear the ideas of others. This increase in “collaborative thinking” would increase the quality of decisions by taking into account more aspects and also increase worker ownership of decisions and hence motivation to carry them out. I found support for these assumptions in decision-making literature (McGuire, 1977).

By 1981, I had self-published a manual, *Building Supportive Community: Mutual Self-Help Through Peer Counseling* (renamed *Focusing In Community: How To Start A Listening/Focusing Support Group* in 2005, and translated into Spanish by Agnes Rodriguez). I incorporated chapters, not just on Focusing Alone, Focusing Partnerships, and Focusing Groups, but also on Interpersonal Focusing for conflict resolution and Collaborative Decision Making for task-oriented meetings.

I had started six Focusing Communities, one each time I moved to a new location, each lasting five to ten years. Mako Hikasa (1999) started over twenty Focusing Groups as a regional, interconnected Focusing Community in Japan. And a number of Changes groups existed throughout the world, where they often sprang up as members of a Focusing Class or Workshop decided to continue on in this self-help context (Changes listing, 2008). But, except in Japan, there had been little spread of Focusing Groups or Communities in a concerted way.

It seemed to me that the world needed these methods for appreciation and respect for the needs and viewpoints of the other and for turning conflict into “empathy” and an attempt to find Win/Win solutions for everyone. So, I started brainstorming about “where are there communities today? Where would be the hotbeds for community building in today’s world?”

WATCHING OTHER IDEAS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE

At the same time, I had watched (over thirty years) while many ideas and methods DID spread like wildfire, particularly in the world of business and organizational development: the concept of “emotional intelligence” and “social intelligence,” from Daniel Goleman’s books (1997, 2007), and EQ at work (Liberti, 2008); Total Quality Management (2008); FISH — Fresh Ideas Start Here (Lundin and Christensen, 2000); the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers, 1980); the Enneagram (Riso and Hudson, 1999); most recently, Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink: Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), which legitimizes “intuition” as a valid method of decision making, a national “best seller.”

Since businesses and organizations seemed to have both motivation and funding for trying out many methods to increase creativity, innovation, and interpersonal effectiveness, I decided to concentrate my major energies on creating a user-friendly version of Listening/Focusing that might “spread like wildfire” through businesses and organizations.

I spent many hours brainstorming with a variety of people in business and organizational settings, and built in the assumption that Listening/Focusing skills learned at work could be carried over into family and community life, giving businesses a double bonus

for their investment. Stress at home contributes greatly to absenteeism and inefficiency at work.

BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE COMMUNITIES

Doing my own Thinking At The Edge (TAE) process, I realized that businesses and organizations ARE communities. By their nature, coworkers are “trapped” in a face-to-face, interdependent situation, which they cannot leave.

SOME ABSOLUTE ESSENTIALS FOR WORKERS

- Learning to work out their interpersonal conflicts
- Having a successful model for making and implementing group decisions
- Having a model for creative, innovative thinking and problem solving and for communication between themselves and their clients
- For co-workers: the ability to work in teams, tolerate their diversity, and make the most of their “differing gifts”

Businesses cannot afford the constant turnover and need for retraining that comes from irresolvable conflicts.

The model I developed for Focusing Communities, articulated in the *Focusing in Community* manual (1981, 2007), included all of these things: not just Focusing Alone for creative problem solving, but also Focusing Partnerships in the context of Focusing Groups or Teams, Interpersonal Focusing for resolving conflicts, and Collaborative Focusing-Oriented Decision Making for task-oriented groups. Here was a “package” of skills and methods that could be brought into businesses and organizations.

At about this time, I gathered up some books at a kiosk at the Northwest Regional Airport near Bentonville, Arkansas — home of mega-business giant WalMart. Everyone who is a vendor for WalMart passes through that airport, so it seemed to me that the books sold there would be cutting edge.

One was *U R A Brand!: How Smart People Brand Themselves For Business Success* by Catherine Kaputa (2005). Walking through it on my plane trip, I did exercises that encouraged me to articulate my niche, my particular offering, to create ‘intellectual capital’ by naming my own innovative ideas, to create rubrics and mnemonics (easy-to-remember) that might ‘spread like wildfire.’

Creating my own ‘intellectual capital’, and hoping to ‘ride the coat tails’ of Gladwell’s success with bestseller *Blink* (2005) validating ‘intuition,’ I reframed the core skill Focusing as **Intuitive Focusing** (McGuire, 2007i). When my husband told me that business people saw ‘empathy’ as a form of weakness, loss of competitive edge, I reframed Empathic Listening as **Focused Listening** (McGuire, 2007f).

I created the mnemonic PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process (McGuire, 2007j), and the prism logo and symbolism throughout the website, for my core ‘product’ to market. I wanted something that could be presented to businesses as a Power Point Presentation. Combining the steps of Gendlin’s Focusing Process with the steps of personality change outlined in his article, “A Theory of Personality Change” (1964), I created:

- **Pausing** to ‘clear a space’ for problem identification
- **Reflection** by self (Inner Relationship) or other (Listening Partnership)
- **Intuitive Focusing** as the back-and-forth between symbols and felt meaning
- **Shifting** as the ‘felt shift,’ the Paradigm Shift bringing a new way of seeing
- **Movement** as the actual action steps that arise from the ‘felt shift’
- **Satisfaction** as the tension release and ‘sureness’ of the “Ahah!” experience
- **Support** as the bonus of community from Listening/Focusing in Partnerships

COLLABORATION = CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

In *Joy At Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun ON The Job*, Dennis W. Bakke (2005), CEO of a huge corporation, AES, worked to get rid of regulations and top-down management, believing that “when American workers are given freedom and responsibility, they are more productive, creative, loyal, and joyful” (Book jacket quoting U.S. Senator Don Nickles).

This attitude of ‘empowerment from the bottom up’ fit right in with the innovative work I had done in non-profit organizations, finding the ‘One Small Thing’ that everyone could be involved in. This ‘grass roots’ collaborative effort built ownership, motivation, and a sense of community. Businesses used words like ‘buy-in’ and ‘loyalty’ to describe this felt experience of ‘bonding’ to the organization or work group. Corporations really do want their workers to enjoy coming to work, enjoy their coworkers, and enjoy using their own best skills to create and actualize innovative ideas.

In *Toppling The Pyramids: Redefining The Way Companies Are Run*, Gerald Ross and Michael Kay (1994) described how, in order to be creative and innovative in today’s ever-shifting market, companies had to be:

- (a) immediately ‘in touch with’ and ‘listening to’ the needs of consumers
- (b) flexible enough to respond immediately to consumer needs with new products

Hierarchy and bureaucracy only stifled creativity and innovation. The old ‘assembly line’ model of the past must give way to flexible teamwork at the interface between consumers and employees.

Here was confirmation of everything I had been thinking about and working with for years in the Focusing Community model. For me, the purpose of Focusing has always

been self-empowerment. As Focusing allows a person to find out what they really want, to look below their surface ‘reactivity’ and take ownership and responsibility for their own felt meanings, Focusing empowers the person to go forward in the world and get what they need, enact their clear vision.

The June 19, 2006 edition of the national magazine, *Business Week*, had a special insert, a special new section on Innovation and Creativity as the new thrust in business. There, in a long article, Conlin (2006) reviewed their choice of ‘Ten Innovation Champions,’ people who had brought about mega-change in their businesses/organizations.

These people often occupied newly-created positions like ‘Vice President of Innovation’. And a majority of them, working in major corporations, were women! And what were they doing? Breaking down walls between cubicles, putting people together in cozy lounge-like settings for collaborative thinking and sharing, using FaceBook-like videos to bring workers closer together, to create community, by letting them get to know each other.

What was the acknowledged keynote of innovation and creativity? Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration: People working across departments, across disciplines, across the boundary between inside and outside the corporation, interacting with each other and consumers and outside experts, collaborating to create new ideas. Bottom-up motivation and egalitarian, collaborative thinking, a more ‘feminine’ model than top-down bureaucracy, were core to both creativity and motivation in businesses and organizations.

In the June 2, 2008, *Business Week*, there was another confirmation. The cover story by Baker and Green (2008), “Beyond Blogs: What Business Needs To Know,” showed that, in the three years since an earlier Cover Story on blogs as basic tools for businesses, emphasis had moved from blogs to “social media” like MySpace, FaceBook, Twitter, LinkedIn — interactive internet communities where consumers can interact directly with companies. Asked for his response, blogging-giant Jeff Jarvis, BuzzMachine, states:

“Next, I think, *Business Week*’s readers will see that social media are changing their fundamental relationship with customers to be less about serving and more about collaborating. No, I don’t mean that every product will be the product of a committee. But customers who want to talk will, and smart companies will not just listen but will engage them in decisions. This will have an impact not just on PR and image but on product design, marketing, sales, customer service — the whole company. Three years from now, I predict *Business Week*’s Cover won’t be about blogs or tools but about **companies as communities.**” (bolding, mine) (p.50).

Companies as communities! With Listening and Focusing skills at their center, businesses and organizations as a kind of Focusing Community!

CREATIVE EDGE ORGANIZATIONS: BASIC THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

- Maximum motivation arises when people are encouraged to create their lives and solutions to problems from their own Creative Edge.
- When organizational structures lose touch with The Creative Edge of individuals, apathy is created.

- True change, at any level, from personal to global, happens by engaging **The Creative Edge** of individual human beings, Gendlin's 'felt sense.' There is no lasting way to impose change from the outside.
- Lasting change is empowered from the individual entering into collaborative action with other individuals (McGuire, 2007c).

The Core Skills of **Focused Listening** and **Intuitive Focusing** provide the basic method for individuals, alone, in pairs, or in groups, to access The Creative Edge, the 'intuitive feel' of thinking and experiencing from which totally new ideas and solutions can arise. They increase creativity and deepen communication and support in any volunteer organization or for-profit corporation.

The fast-paced, argumentative, competitive nature of much group decision making discussion makes it impossible for anyone to pay attention to and speak from The Creative Edge, the right-brain, 'intuitive feel' which can contain the newest, freshest, most innovative solutions. Given the energy expended on simply trying to interrupt and get a turn, participants cannot really listen to the contributions of others.

Instant "Ahah!" Collaborative Thinking (McGuire, 2007g) gives the simple "How To's" for groups which I discovered when I undertook research to describe the difference between aggressive, competitive, and *Listening/Focusing-oriented* meetings (Boukydis a.k.a. McGuire, 1975; McGuire, 1977).

The most creative solutions, either in individual or in group decision-making, arise when the individual or the group is able to sit with polarized oppositions and wait until a newly-created 'third way' can arise. We call this a 'win/win' decision: instead of a painful compromise where each side really gives up more than they are willing to, and, later, finds reasons not to carry out the decision, a 'win/win' decision, a much more effective option, really does contain enough aspects from both sides to produce satisfaction, and thus motivation.

Pure consensual decision making can be extremely time-consuming, since no action can be taken until every member agrees to go along with it. **The Collaborative Edge Decision Making (CEDM)** (2007b) application includes the use of Coordinated Collaboration as a method for brainstorming from the bottom/up without having decision-making bog down.

The Creative Edge Organization method, with **The One Small Thing component** continually breaks down projects to the level where as many individuals as possible can be actively involved in problem solving and decision-making from The Creative Edge and in carrying out projects. This method gives participants a feeling of "ownership" of the group's work and also the benefits to community building of working together on a joint goal.

Although top/down hierarchical structures can also be used for aspects of the work, *The One Small Thing* component works from the bottom/up to involve every person actively in action and decision-making where that is possible.

(See **Instant "Ahah!" Empowerment Organization** (2007h) for a Focusing exercise to find 'The One Small Thing').

THE CREATIVE EDGE PYRAMID: BASIC MODEL FOR INCORPORATING LISTENING/FOCUSING THROUGHOUT ORGANIZATIONS

The Creative Edge Pyramid (McGuire, 2007e), seven applications for using the core skills, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, emphasizes that the same core skills can be used at home as well as at work. Stress at home causes great absenteeism and lack of productivity at the work place. Businesses need a two-edged sword, stress reduction at home and work, for increasing creativity and innovation.

Here is The Creative Edge Pyramid, utilizing the visual mnemonic of a ‘prism’:

Focusing Alone for Personal Growth
Focusing Partnership for Ongoing Creativity
Interpersonal Focusing for Conflict Resolution
Focusing Group/Team for Innovative Problem Solving
Collaborative Edge Decision Making for Win/Win Meetings
Focusing Community To Facilitate Diversity and Mutual Support
Creative Edge Organization To Motivate People From the Bottom Up

Any method can be used as free-standing, and all of them together add up to **Creative Edge Organizations**.

In approximately forty hours of training, Creative Edge Focusing Consultants teach everyone involved the PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process, with its two Core Skills, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, and how to use PRISMS/S in the Creative Edge Pyramid of Applied Methods. Not limited only to business, students, parents, teachers, physicians, executives, managers, employees, or community members can acquire the “emotional intelligence” skills to:

- Create new ideas
- Change problem behaviors
- Listen to another
- Resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Start a support group
- Build supportive community
- Create innovative solutions
- Create win/win decisions in groups
- Motivate others for collaborative action

FROM INDIVIDUALS TO ORGANIZATIONS

The methods start with personal use of Intuitive Focusing and build to the integration of Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening into interpersonal, group/team, community, and organizational interaction. Examples of each approach can be found under Case Studies (McGuire, 2007a) at www.cefocusing.com:

1. Focusing Alone (or with the help of a CE Focusing Consultant or Focusing Professional) for Personal Growth:

Intuitive Focusing allows individuals to pay attention to the Creative Edge, the ‘intuition’ or ‘hunch’ which contains the sense of ‘the whole thing’ and to articulate this sense into innovative ideas, artistic creations, and totally new actions, instant “Ahah!” experiences. Intuitive Focusing also allows individuals to pay attention to the Creative Edge under repetitive, ‘irrational,’ self-defeating or confusing behavior patterns and, out of this Creative Edge, to create new responses, experiencing Paradigm Shifts that lead to new behaviors.

In Focusing-Oriented Coaching, a Creative Edge Focusing Consultant or Certified Focusing Professional can help an individual learn and use Intuitive Focusing by providing Focused Listening responses and coaching in how to develop the Inner Listener and to use Focusing for problem resolution. The Focuser learns to recognize and deal with the voice of the Inner Critic, to turn a Caring Feeling Presence toward their inner experiencing, to resolve conflicts between different aspects of the Self, and to articulate gut intuitions’ into concrete ideas, solutions, and action steps.

2. Focusing Partnership For Ongoing Creativity

Through the Focusing Partnership method, Focused Listening by a partner helps an individual to use Intuitive Focusing to articulate new ideas and to change problem behaviors. A weekly meeting to exchange Listening/Focusing turns as equals, be it for creative ideas or emotional healing, allows partners to follow a theme of problem solving consistently.

In organizations, learning the Focused Listening skill in this peer counseling context also provides a seamless interface to Focused Listening with customers, clients, and consumers, uncovering true wants and needs which can be served by the organization. Whether friends, employees, or customers, people are more willing to listen to our perspective and cooperate with us when they first feel deeply understood.

3. Interpersonal Focusing for Conflict Resolution

The Interpersonal Focusing method provides a structure where people in a conflict can exchange Listening/Focusing turns. In interpersonal conflict situations, the Focused Listening skill makes a space for Intuitive Focusing, where individuals can tap into Gendlin’s ‘felt sense,’ The Creative Edge, in the middle of interacting with another person. While Focusing, each participant can come in touch with the Creative Edge, the deeper, ‘subconscious’ meanings driving the conflict. While Listening, each comes to understand and empathize with the Focuser. A third person can serve as a Listening Facilitator.

Through the Interpersonal Focusing method, Focused Listening allows individuals to understand each other, move out of polarized positions in decision making, and avoid disagreements based on mistaken assumptions, prejudice, and stereotyping. Misunderstanding is replaced with empathic understanding and respect for the unique perspective of the other. Interpersonal Focusing can be an important part of Diversity Training in organizations.

Whether conflicts are interpersonal, inter-group, national, or global, Interpersonal Focusing allows the creation of new understandings which lead to creative resolutions.

4. Focusing Group/Team for Creative Problem Solving

In the Focusing Group/Team method, participants come together to ‘check in’ on progress since the last meeting and to break into pairs or triads for the equal exchange of Listening/Focusing turns. For emotional healing, the Focusing Group provides ongoing support. For team support in a work environment, Creative Edge Focusing Teams generate feelings of collegiality and mutual support, rather than aggressive competition, and provide ongoing networking and support for creative problem solving.

The Focusing Group/Team method teaches every individual how to run a group meeting, whether for emotional or creative problem solving. Groups follow a simple format involving a timed ‘Check In’ by each person, a short time for Announcements/Business, then break out into Focusing Partnerships for the exchange of Listening/Focusing turns as peers, ending with a few minutes of “Closure,” anyone who chooses sharing what came up in their Focusing Turn.

Focusing Groups/Teams, since they involve equal time and attention to the needs of each participant, are a form of burn-out prevention, providing much needed ‘nurturing’ even in a business context.

5. Collaborative Edge Decision Making for Win/Win Meetings

The Collaborative Edge Decision Making Application (McGuire, 2007b), with its components of Shared Leadership, Coordinated Collaboration, and Creative Edge Impasse Resolution techniques, provides concrete methods for insuring the protected space needed for articulating new ideas and resolving conflicts at decision making meetings. Whether in group, community, organizational, or international decision making and conflict resolution situations, Intuitive Focusing within meetings allows participants to contribute new ideas from the Creative Edge, generating innovative solutions. Focused Listening moves polarizing conflicts to win/win solutions.

6. Focusing Community To Facilitate Diversity and Mutual Support

In The Focusing Community method, Focusing Groups/Teams go beyond exchanging Listening/Focusing turns and incorporate the Interpersonal Focusing and Creative Edge Decision Making Methods for conflict resolution and win-win decision making. Community, whether for emotional, social, or organizational purposes, involves individuals working together toward a common goal. Community depends upon being able to incorporate a

diversity of personalities, skills, and viewpoints and to make decisions that meet the needs of the whole group.

Conflict is inevitable and, seen as representing a Creative Edge of innovation, is part of the added creativity which comes through collaborative endeavor. The Focusing Community component, with Interpersonal Focusing for conflict resolution, can be a method of Diversity Training in organizations.

7. Creative Edge Organization To Motivate People From The Bottom Up

In the Creative Edge Organization method, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening norms protect and nurture intuition, creativity, and innovation at the personal, individual point of each participant's own internal passion and motivation. Apathy is the enemy of creativity. Motivation from the bottom up is ignited through Focusing Partnerships, Groups and Teams that engage each individual's Creative Edge. Experiences of empathy and community, as well as participation in collaborative decision making, create ownership, 'buy in,' loyalty, and commitment to future action.

CONCLUSION

In organizations, the exchange of Listening/Focusing turns creates ongoing support for innovative thinking and creative, collaborative problem solving. When PRISMS/S, with Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, is used in interpersonal, group, or organizational problem solving situations, win/win decisions are created out of polarized conflicts, and innovative thinking is unleashed.

The Empowerment Organization method of Creative Edge Organization uses PRISMS/S to discover the One Small Thing which will ignite action, ownership, and 'buy in' at every level in the organization. Whether in community building, volunteer organizations, corporations, or participatory democracy, motivation depends upon finding, as a first step, that 'one small thing' which each and every person is willing and able to do.

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CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE

*Heidrun Essler, René Veugelers, Simon Kilner
International Board for the Coordination of Children Focusing*

THE GOAL IS A GENERATION OF CHILDREN WHO GROW UP FOCUSING.

Children are the future and Children who Focus are the future of Focusing. The goal is a generation of children who grow up Focusing. They behave and relate to others in ways that are felt sensed and congruent. This radical vision of early empowerment (and not later repair) we are naming “Children Focusing”. It needs to be seen widely as our answer to problems faced by children, their caregivers, and professionals.

Right now, Children Focusing is in transition towards the development of national and international support networks. There is a strong foundation of commitment, energy and activity in Children Focusing today, and yet many activists are working alone or in small groups. Moving towards the goal requires the creation of more effective structures. People helping children to Focus and the greater Focusing Community both need to find ways to create more drive and belonging within International Children Focusing.

This article is structured to survey the present situation, and then outline the difficulties, goals, and ways forward. The format is based on the problem solving questions of: Why are we writing this article? Where are we? Where do we want to be? What are the possible steps? What can you do? There is a summary of key points at the beginning of each section.

WHY ARE WE WRITING THIS ARTICLE?

USE OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP FOCUSING PROCESS IS ESSENTIAL TO THE ETHOS AND PRACTICE OF TRANSFORMATION

Key Points

- Children Focusing is what we want to have happen.
- Children Focusing is a powerful name because it is a descriptive action statement and goal.
- The use of the Focusing process is at the heart of change in the organisation of Children Focusing at an international level.
- Children Focusing activists are working all over the world, in many areas of child development, and in many languages.
- The International Children Focusing Community needs more drive.
- The priority is to identify and resolve difficulties with communication in the International Children Focusing.

Those who live in the energy of Children Focusing know that it is a profound life skill that can be nurtured in children. Children Focusing is more than adults Focusing with children. It is empowering individual children to grow up open to the guidance of their felt senses. We have adjusted the name 'Children's Focusing' to 'Children Focusing' because it is an action statement that describes the fundamental goal. The pathways to this goal are simple but challenging. First, bring more adults to an understanding of the advantages that Focusing can bring to them and the children in their lives. Second, spread the skills in adults and children, so that the advantages can be demonstrated. Third, facilitate people involved in Children Focusing across the world to effectively support each other.

The coordination of International Children Focusing was passed to us (the authors) from Marta Stapert one year ago. This brought a special responsibility for supporting the transformation of Children Focusing into the future. We are conscious that our own individual and group Focusing process is essential to the ethos and practice of this transformation, and that inclusion, respect, balance, and effectiveness are our guiding principles. Throughout the world, many people, past and present, have built strong individual foundations by helping children to Focus, yet most are working alone or in small regional groups. There are only a few countries with national organisations, and as a result, the International Children Focusing Community is, as yet, small and fragmented.

One original aim of this article was to describe the different activities around Children Focusing in the world. To this end, with the full support of the Focusing Institute, we wrote to the Discussion Lists to call for people to describe their work, however small. An automatic online response form was set up on the Children Focusing Corner Website with a simple link from the Homepage. Up to the time of writing this article, we have only had about ten responses, and therefore have revised the aim of our article. It has become clear that to lay solid foundations for future development, our priority must be to identify and remedy the barriers to communication within International Children Focusing. To that end, the survey form remains to collect information over a longer period of time. Our aim is for it to be translated into other languages and responses from non-English speaking individuals put into English.

WHERE ARE WE?

PEOPLE WORKING IN CHILDREN FOCUSING ARE TOO ISOLATED

Key Points

- People working in Children Focusing do not talk with each other sufficiently.
- Reliance on English is a structural barrier excluding many people helping children to Focus.
- National and special interest groups are not strong enough to support the diverse applications of Children Focusing for different developmental ages and fields of child support.
- Children Focusing has a requirement to communicate with children, policy makers and those responsible for the safety of children.

SOME FACTS

The survey responses that we received catalogued work being done in Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, USA, Switzerland, Canada, UK, and France. These are in areas as diverse as working with parents, teachers, teenage girls, groups of 6-14 year olds, preschoolers and nursery schools. However, we know that there are many more people helping children to Focus throughout the world.

- 152 people are subscribed to the Children's Discussion List. This is clearly not enough to generate consistent vibrant contributions.
- There are 67 articles from 41 authors available on the Children's Website. However, only one of these contributions has been written since 2001. Various articles were published in a Hungarian/English booklet Fokusz-Tanulmányok in 2006, but these are not available on the website as yet.
- The 1997 Folio published articles on Focusing with children from infancy to teenagers, classroom approaches, art and play therapy. The 1993 Folio included articles about children and play.
- Various articles about Children Focusing have appeared in "Staying in Focus".
- Five International Conferences for Children Focusing have taken place over ten years. These have had approximately 200 participants.
- Adults helping children to Focus are living in 16 countries — and these are only the people we know.
- The Children Focusing Corner currently has a budget of 1074,27 Euros which is insufficient for the work we are facing.

COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

Unfortunately, the number of people who are responding to the existing communication structures do not create a sense of dynamism. The present international structures are a conference every two years, the Discussion List, and the Website. Children Focusing Conferences are small — 25-40 people are a common attendance. Participants come mainly from the host nation and the surrounding countries. Clearly, many people involved in helping children to Focus find it hard to attend conferences. We believe the small size of conferences is also a result of a more underlying issue that effects all communication in Children Focusing. Many non-English speaking people are excluded from Children Focusing communication structures as English is the primary language of sharing. Our present assumption is that many, or most, people helping children to Focus do not feel confident speaking English

In addition, it is possible that computer literacy and access are also barriers to the crucial sharing structures, such as the internet-based Website and Discussion List.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

The Children Focusing Community is concerned that too many people are working in isolation. Some of the difficulties may lie in the effects of how Children Focusing has developed historically. Centres of activity in Children Focusing tend to be small and geographically far apart. They have tended to look within themselves for support. The development of a network of Children Focusing Coordinators is only just beginning and their place within the community of general Focusing Coordinators is still underdeveloped. In the general Focusing Community, national organisations and special interest groups have come together within an existing international network where they feel a sense of belonging, but this is not the case with Children Focusing. Even though we know there are varying degrees of national organisation in Canada, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Romania, Suriname, the Netherlands and UK, each with individuals who have a sense of their place in the International Focusing Community, these small groups and individuals have not been coordinated enough to drive the Children Focusing Community forward.

Perhaps many people involved in Children Focusing have not yet considered the benefits of being part of an international community. Or it is possible that they have not conceived of the initial steps that they might make to be more involved internationally. Perhaps they have not yet found the space, in the busy demands of their current work, to give time to such a vision.

Moreover, Children Focusing has not yet developed special interest groups within itself to reflect the variety of skills for working with different ages, from babies to teenagers. Further, we have few shared descriptions of the varied approaches needed in the key fields of childcare and development, such as education, health, social care, and family. The special interests groups currently existing are, at best in nascent stages.

LIFE CONDITIONS

We recognise employment, culture, and self-image as another set of barriers to a large-scale Children Focusing community. Many people helping children to Focus are employed with relatively low incomes. They may be parents or grandparents. Travelling is limited by finances and holidays that are not always consistent during different times of year. There is not a world of self-determined work schedules and subsidised or tax deductible expenses for international conferences. Another consideration is that many Children Focusers are not comfortable presenting their very real skills in the daunting arena of an international, multi lingual community.

RESTRICTED VISIONS

The first area of restricted vision is within the general Focusing Community. We are concerned that many Focusing professionals, trainers and coordinators are not actively seeking to promote the benefits and skills of adults helping children to Focus.

The second area of restricted vision lies outside the Focusing Community. There are obviously many people working with children who have not yet heard of Children Focusing, let alone the kind of future it could bring to the children in their care. This target group is massive, and can be divided into areas such education, health, social care and family. Within that are further age related groups. Gaining access to the gatekeepers in these areas requires Children Focusing to demonstrate simple, safe, and cost effective answers to the problems that present themselves in different areas.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD AND CHILDREN WHO FOCUS ARE THE FUTURE OF FOCUSING.

Key Points

- Children have the opportunity of growing up empowered by Focusing.
- Children Focusing is common place in every area of child development.
- We have effective regional, national and international communication structures.
- Children Focusing is understood as an answer to problems faced by children, their caregivers, and professionals.
- The words, *Children are the Future*, are regularly on the lips and in the writings of prominent and active members of the Focusing Community and beyond.
- The attitudes, skill set, and language of Focusing are commonplace in every area of child development.

In order for the rich rewards of Children Focusing to be widespread and articulated, extensive and active regional, national and international Children Focusing communication structures must be designed for the needs and characteristics of people who are involved in Children Focusing. We must have a language of Children Focusing that caregivers and children of all ages can understand.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE STEPS?

TO EMPOWER CHILDREN TO FOCUS, WE MUST REACH THE ADULTS TO TEACH CHILDREN FOCUSING.

Key Points

- It is a priority that we develop interconnecting groups of people for coordination, advice, support, and outreach.
- Key communications need to be translated in more languages.
- Children Focusing needs to be widely understood as part of the theory and practice of person-centred child development.
- Marketing approaches need to give clear answers to the problems faced by children and their caregivers.

COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

The job of the international coordination of Children Focusing is to create communication structures that promote our vision. First, it is important to acknowledge the existing structures that are already in place to maintain and develop communication in Children Focusing. Second, International Children Focusing requires more sharing of activity and day-to-day roles. For example, in addition to International Coordinators, we might organize

- A Circle of Trustees
- National and Special Interest Coordinators
- Individual or shared roles supporting translation, web-site design and updating, discussion list and newsletter activity, financial management
- Advisors to support specific areas such as research, community development, marketing, training

Such a coordinated organizational structure could develop more clear and effective lines of communication between many levels of people who are, or could be, helping children to Focus. It has taken us a year to begin to develop ourselves, as International Coordinators, into a strong team with effective, Focusing-based working practices. This process is not finished yet.

WEBSITE

The development of the Children Focusing Corner Website into a modern, user-friendly and two-way resource is a crucial long-term objective. We have had great support from The Focusing Institute in the adjustments we have made so far. The site needs complete redevelopment and someone who can manage the day to day changes that an interactive energetic website requires. The site needs to include at least:

- An attractive and simple navigation system and face
- Up-to-date academic articles exploring Children Focusing in different areas of application
- Reports of good practice for different interest groups
- Contacts to teachers, practitioners and coordinators for different countries and areas of interest
- Regular news updates
- Accessible archives
- Evidence of effective work done, such as quotes from children and adults

We need funding and skilled persons to effectively approach the required redesign and everyday management.

DISCUSSION LIST

At the moment we are studying how to make the Discussion List more vital with more people contributing — including non-English speaking individuals. Of course, moderating a multilingual discussion list would be nearly impossible, but it may be possible to build a system where areas of discussion are summarised in many languages to allow interested individuals to target areas of interest.

CONFERENCES

Currently, there is an interest in holding International Children Focusing Conferences in Canada, Netherlands, and Israel to follow this year's conference in Hungary. This is wonderful and very encouraging. We also wish to develop other group formats, such as regional gatherings, which would more effectively use time, energy, and money — and reach more people.

TRAINING AND QUALITY

There are training projects for adults helping children to Focus in countries including Canada, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Romania, Suriname, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and USA. More courses are planned in Argentina, Greece, and Spain.

National trainers clearly want to be independent and flexible — and this is to be encouraged. We wish to share common standards and approaches within International Children Focusing so we need flexible and individual training styles and equivalents, and clear training standards. These standards will be a requirement for gatekeepers in institutions, politics, and funding and have to be specific for different countries.

Another area we wish to see growing is the incorporation of Children Focusing approaches and promotion within primarily adult training courses. At the International Conferences we have already seen more attention to approaches similar to Children Focusing, such as symbolisation through pictures, collages, and movements.

Existing general Focusing events such as the *Summer School* and *Weeklong* can provide a model for growing Children Focusing interest groups in areas such as: education, health, social care, and family.

Children Focusing requires a greater research base, in order to develop evidence for the effectiveness of Focusing, while placing Children Focusing within child development and learning theory. There are areas where Focusing already touches existing theories and practice. Focusing is rooted in the person-centred movement. Individual learning pathways are now widely considered to be foundational for child-development in education, health, social care, and the family. Important roots lie in Rogers' approaches to person centred learning and trust of the learner's own process (Rogers, 1969, 1982). Multi sensory learning is central to accepted learning and teaching practice. Focusing is by definition multi sensory and experiential, because it blends cognition through awareness of touch, vision and hearing. Experiential learning and giving learning personal meaning are part of the work of Claxton (1985).

Focusing improves the understanding of the learning relationship. It brings skills for helping others learn, and as well, in managing personal uncertainty. How learning can be structured, to help the learner/student to take personal ownership has been studied by Vygotsky (Bruner, 1990 and Wood, 1988). Vygotsky's concept of a 'zone proximal development', proposes that learning occurs at the edge of what is already known. This is a practice familiar to every Focuser.

Focusing has much to offer in acknowledging the role of feelings in learning. Goleman proposes a curriculum to develop 'Emotional Intelligence' to prepare young people for life (1996). Le Doux gives this a neural science research base (1996). These ideas are increasingly informing personal and social child development curricula. Schools are seeking effective and simple approaches to develop their practice. Children Focusing has tools to assist in the development of personal and social skills in learners.

At the highest political and policy levels movements such as "*Every Child Matters*" in the UK, are linking social, educational and family support within a child centred framework (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk). There are similar movements in other countries. Workers are seeking methods to put government policy into practice in pediatric health care, family support, and school. Within these areas the Focusing method has the potential to gain such government support.

In this article we can only touch on possible areas of Focusing applications. We need people who can articulate Focusing theory and practice, in order to develop a role for Children Focusing in education, health, social care, and the family.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Children Focusing requires strategic marketing and promotion across all fields related to child development .

The promotion of Children Focusing requires approaches that target children, carers, academics, politicians, managers and fund-holders. At the marketing level it must lay out the benefits, safety, and methods in simple language, which is clear and attractive. As we talk to different target audiences we also need a language that they can understand. This should give achievable solutions to their immediate problems. Focusing is an approach that fits well into developmental models that are individual, preventative, skill based, and socially responsible. Statements of effectiveness need to give evidence of the beneficial experiences of adult and child clients. These can take the form of short quotes, case studies, research data and books.

One example is the English publication of Marta Stapert's book (Stapert and Verliefde, 2008) which advances the profile of Children Focusing, helping English speaking people to get an overview of Children Focusing and practical skills to work with children.

A marketing strategy to address these issues needs a lot of careful development. We will be giving time and thought to this area. We will be looking for statements and 'slogans' that might appeal to children on the street, parents in their living rooms, or managers in their offices. Examples of this might be "Children Focusing helps you make friends and decisions" or "Children Focusing unlocks a mysterious force within you that brings wisdom."

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Will you notice inside what is being moved by reading this article?
- Can you recognise what blocks you from taking more action to support Children Focusing internationally?
- Will you ask a question on the discussion list?
- Can you answer a question on the discussion list?
- Will you translate?
- Can you help with the Website?
- Will you include Children Focusing more in your work?
- Can you include Children Focusing more in your training?
- Will you use Focusing more with the children in your life?

Or maybe you have your own way of doing things for Children Focusing. LET US KNOW.

Children are the future and Children who Focus are the future of Focusing.

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GENE GENDLIN'S GIFT FOR CHILDREN

Lucy Bowers

“Turn, turn, turn this world around for the children, turn this world around.”

— Raffi's song

THE EARLY LANDSCAPE

It is the early '60's and I am walking into my very first classroom on the first day of school to begin my career as school teacher. I greet the children, full of expectation as they quietly take their seats. “Hello boys and girls my name is...” and a young boy in the front seat interrupts me with an expletive. The class starts to laugh, and I leave the room. I pause in the hallway outside the door I have just closed behind me. I need to gather my composure while the children are becoming louder and rowdier. I have been rattled and am not certain about how to deal with the situation so soon upon the opening bell. I am about to enter with some new vague plan as to what to do and just then the principal walks up and into the room ahead of me. No questions asked, she walks directly to that boy and pulls him out of his seat, marches him with a firm grip by the arm into the office and commands me to follow. How did she know it was him?

I am instructed to observe how she does what she is about to do. I am to sign the book as the necessary witness to the punishment being dealt. A strap is pulled from her desk drawer. It is a flat, flexible black rubber strip, about 1 to 2 inches wide, perhaps a little more than a foot long and one side, roughly textured. I can still recall how it felt to hold it in my hand as I write this description.

The boy is given some serious smacks on each open hand, and they turn red. He has tears and winces, but does not make a sound. I am to take him back to the classroom, and my first day of teaching can now begin. The class is quiet and cooperative for the remainder of the day. I, in the meantime, am struggling with something going on inside me for which I do not yet have words. I know I had anxiety about coming into my first class that morning and even during the previous nights and days. But now I am totally uncomfortable and saddened with the surprise of all this unexpectedness, and there is tightness in my chest.

As the months go by this scenario is played out often for reasons that seem much smaller than the punishment suggests. This class is a grade two class. English is the second language for nearly 80 percent of the children, and there are 32 boys and 4 girls. The average age is 10 because each of these children had been held back at least twice since they began in Kindergarten at the age of 5. Many arrive at school with welts and bruises from a father's or an uncle's belt used for punishments at home for reasons I cannot begin to guess. The class is not doing well with the expectations in each of the subject areas, and these children are lacking in a broad range of experiences other than their lack of English.

By the end of the first month into my career, I am taught to give the strap. I am told it is my job to keep control over this problem class. Without having control over them they won't learn anything. I must cover the wrist so as not to cause damage. It is suggested I switch from hand to hand so that the time between the strapping allows the feeling back in, in this way each whack is more effective. At the end of October, I realize I am not meant for this type of work. I write my letter of resignation, to take effect by Christmas break and hand it in. I am ready to seek out what it is I am to do with the rest of my life.

During the month of November, I am spoken to at length to reconsider my request. At the same time, I am becoming attached to these children. I like them at a deep level. They are my very first class, and my sense of belonging there is growing in spite of me. I feel they need much in the way of patient, gentle, loving kindness, and I want so much for them to have an experience of that. My need to give it grows in proportion to the need I see. I realize that there is not one teacher with experience in that school who wants anything to do with these children. I become possessive and protective of them.

At one of those discussions around my impending resignation, I find myself making a deal. I would stay on for the year, but I am to be allowed to work with those children in the best way I know how. Most importantly no strap would be given by me or anyone else no matter what. The powers that be agree to these terms, and my letter of resignation is ripped up. I begin my teaching career in earnest.

By the end of that school year, I had bonded with these children and celebrated every little forward movement in their learning with them for six months. They became motivated and wonderfully cooperative. We were a tight group together against a confused and cruel world. I sobbed on the last day as we said goodbye, and my sadness was not mine alone. No expletives were heard, but instead a great improvement in English allowed the children to express their gratitude for our year together. They were also capable of communicating their sadness around our separation. I wished to continue on with this first class of mine the following year, but this was not encouraged, and I was made an offer at another school that was difficult to refuse.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In those early days of teaching young and vulnerable children, I was often heard to complain about the circumstance in which I found myself. "It shouldn't hurt to be a child" was my mantra whenever someone would listen to my stories of distress. "Children are resilient" was the response of the day. How much resilience would a child need to compensate for the gap in their development compared to other children who were loved, secure, well fed, nurtured and wanted? Learning much later from Eugene Gendlin about how lack of bodily awareness can allow situations or events to linger for a very long time, one needs to ask how that would affect resilience.

"In Western countries, we have witnessed a tenfold increase in the incidence of depression across two generations in the twentieth century. And the disorder is

striking at younger and younger ages. When we were undergraduate students, our professors taught us that 10 percent of Americans experienced clinical depression at least once in their lives and that the first bout usually strikes in the late twenties or early thirties. And now we stand at the podium and regrettably report to our undergraduates that 20 percent of Americans will fall to clinical depression and that the epidemic is striking school-age children.”

— Reivich and Shatte

This need led to some studies that attempted to address the lack of resilience which seemed to be a consequence of what was the experience of children both at home and at school. The early 90's saw the work of Dr. Martin Seligman and his students develop some programs to avoid depression in school children. In fact, overcoming the vulnerable childhood experienced by so many, who then use up the resilience with which they were born, can be successful in my opinion by adding Focusing to the educational experience.

My first class was an example of many painful lives being lived at a young age. The need for change was clear to many, yet was slow to be addressed. Children suffering from neglect, abandonment, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, continued to be in my classes as my career covered many decades of change. The family behaviour patterns were also ingrained and passed on from decade to decade. One sense of awareness changing was that the strap was deemed harmful as a manner of punishment in the schools of Ontario. With relief I can report that corporal punishment to keep control over children is no longer lawful. In 1968 a report on education in Ontario recommended this legal use of corporal punishment be ended. Yet it was not until 2005 that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on it and outlawed this practice across Canada. What a long time between awareness and action!

If we look only at that one aspect of using a tool for discipline that was being condoned and encouraged, the question that lingers is, how much suffering is still being physically carried in the body long after the body healed the physical scars? This is just one small example of what was wrong in our understanding of how to relate to one another; one small indicator of how little we understood, and how great the lack of our awareness. The list of other types of abuses is lengthy and has permeated our culture for an extended period of time. During the seventies and eighties we saw a brief glimpse of possibilities appear, as education became more child centered and made attempts to meet glaring needs and deficiencies. Research was happening to teach us how children learn and how they fail. Happily, psychology was a young and fast growing field of science and study in the twentieth century. By the middle of it Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and the work of Jean Piaget began to have direct influence on the field of education.

What are the scars these children from my first class might still bear now that they are in their 50's? I often wonder, especially when listening to someone in their 50's during a Focusing session. It often happens that some childhood experience comes forward painfully, with the awareness that it has been held in the body all these decades. I watch tears that have aged for decades flow; tears that might have been allowed or acknowledged in the moment. How did that memory, held there, influence or even change the choices, the relationships

and the paths taken along the way? How could the relationship with parents have been more loving?

What is it that teachers needed to help build a non-threatening and nurturing learning environment? How could children find a safe place to learn if the school reflects all these painful and anxious experiences children often have in their very own homes? Should schools not be havens and a refuge from those societal ills being passed on from generation to generation? From where could the role modeling come? How could anyone affect change even if it was needed? Would change be from administration or teachers?

About the same time that I began questioning what I was experiencing as a teacher, Eugene Gendlin as a philosophy student at the University of Chicago was becoming curious about what constitutes healthy therapy and asking the questions that needed to be explored.

“Why doesn’t therapy succeed more often? Why does it so often fail to make a difference in people’s lives? In the rarer cases when it does succeed, what is it that those patients and therapists do? What is it that the majority fail to do?”

— E.T. Gendlin

Thanks to his explorations at the University of Chicago, Focusing became a gift to a world that was desperate for a fresh new way of seeing, feeling, and doing. I have come to believe that with those shifts from felt sensing that Focusing offers, it is never too late to have that elusive “happy childhood” so few of us had.

In my early teaching years, my philosophy of education at that time, was forming under the influence of Rachel Carson. Back in 1956 she had written the following words that captured my heart.

“A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe inspiring, is dimmed and lost before we even reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.”

— Rachel Carson

How I longed to find ways to make Rachel Carson’s wish come true! It seemed so important for the many underprivileged, abused, and hurting students that I was becoming closely bonded with throughout the years. There were countless stumbling blocks to their learning. How could I make a difference in their lives to offer them more success in their

social lives, more growth in their intellectual development, stability in their emotional landscapes, and some controls over their behavioural impulses? Twenty years after I began my career as a classroom teacher and had become the mother of three children, I was introduced to Focusing. Here is where my philosophy of education collided with a new practice and found a way to merge into something new, exciting, and wonder-filled. Focusing was “beautiful and awe-inspiring!” Focusing nurtured my “sense of wonder!” What a paradigm shift in the way I began to experience my world! I was captivated and became totally involved in learning everything I could about Focusing, practicing it passionately, and by invitation from my two teachers, I also began to teach it.

The old adage, “We teach best what we need to know most”, exactly fits my experience. I learned much from my classroom students over the years, and now my Focusing students are teaching me how to deepen into the practice. The trust I felt connecting to my body just grew and grew. Yes indeed there was a wisdom inside, and I loved the discovery of it bit by bit. It was inevitable that this practice in my life would leak out of me and into my work. I describe how easily and fluidly that happened in an article published in the *Staying In Focus* newsletter in 2001 September.

MORE INFLUENCES FOR MOMENTUM

At about the same time, Jack Miller in Toronto was researching and writing about the desperate need for the body mind connection that was missing in the classroom. He cited a large body of research that showed the consequences of an educational system that emphasized those body mind divisions. For example he used the work of James Lynch (1985) who was discovering how little people were aware of the bodily changes they were undergoing during various moments of anxiety, anger, sadness, etc. Miller proposed using visualizations and meditation as a way to have students improve creativity. These were among many proposals for teaching the whole child.

Meanwhile I was using Focusing in the classroom with my students and noticing an increase in creative writing and a rise in interest for learning. Inquisitive parents began to come to my Focusing workshops. The reverse is happening today. I am retired from the classroom. Now I offer workshops to parents who begin to find ways to use Focusing with their children at home. I give workshops to teachers who are finding many creative ways to use Focusing in the classroom. In my opinion, the key to using Focusing as an adult who is interacting with a child in any capacity is to have a deep understanding of Focusing and making it a practice in their personal lives. The all important *Felt Sense* is the best guide for the next step in any given situation. The *Focusing Attitude* and the practice of “presence” create the climate for a child to feel heard, valued, and for shifts to take place and indeed they do.

“I sometimes think the primary deed of the parent is to see the beauty and grace of children. Children are magnificent, gorgeous beyond telling. They themselves have no idea of what beauty they embody. Can you see the tragedy

of a child with no one to feel and cherish its beauty? No one to fall in love with this magnificent creature? No one to celebrate its splendor?"

— Brian Swimme

“Elevator Rides”, a specific method to teach children a way to connect to their physical bodies, was for me a successful, simple, child-friendly (and fun) way to allow children a safe way to go inside, observe, experience, and come to know their own stories from within. This worked well from about age 5 to 9. It came from the joy that all children exhibit when stories are read to them. They are enchanted by the flow of a story that holds them gently and finds resonance with places that live inside them, touching these at the level of their own short life experiences and deeper.

The art of learning involves three all-important components, skills, knowledge, and affect. All the affect needed for learning and providing the “glue” to make the skills and knowledge “stick” can be found in a good story. When children connect to stories outside of themselves, the effects are profound. When children design their very own elevators, they can go inside themselves and explore the stories that are their very own stories, then we actually can observe change in behavior; stumbling blocks to learning also seem to dissipate over time. The Elevator is safe because the child is in control of the process. They design it in the way they want it to look and the control panel becomes very important. Each child can make the elevator go up or down or sideways or in fact, anywhere in their bodies that they would like to visit and spend some time.

However they know the two most important buttons in the elevator are marked STORY and STOP. When they decide to push the STORY button, they know that the elevator will just go where it wants, and they sit back to notice what happens. After years of observing children and having them share their stories, I know from experience that *a lot happens*. When they feel overwhelmed, they stop. One little boy, whose mother was undergoing chemotherapy and thinking she would die, shared, “If I don’t like the story going on, I sometimes flip the story button like a remote and go to another channel in my body to watch that for a while.” The stories in there are always about the body. “Then I can go back to the first one when I get curious about it again.” (The mechanics of doing such an activity as Elevator Rides with children, can be found in the newsletter *Staying in Focus*, and is referenced below.)

By age ten, children seem to need new ways to be introduced to Focusing, and happily there are many people experimenting with those ways. Marta Stapert’s book *Focusing With Children*, just translated into English, provides many such wonderful examples. (See bookstore at www.focusing.org)

One important aspect I have learned from Focusing with children is how valuable the follow-up activity is. The importance of symbolizing their felt sense experiences in some ways with a variety of materials such as clay, paint, pastels, crayons, cutting and pasting collages, etc. allows the process to continue unfolding where words fail to fit or are lacking. I now use it for ages 5 to adult as a way to allow the felt sense to unfold with or without explicit meaning. Also as another follow-up activity, the use of journaling entices children, tentative

in their ability to write and read to take more risks, an important quality to enhance learning. Children noticed quickly without needing to say anything that there was an intrinsic reward for them in these practices, and their increased motivation verified it.

The community aspect of the classroom also begins to grow as social interactions seem to be much less troubled by conflict. Self regulation lacking in some children seems to improve. Cooperation and understanding are becoming an important part of the “community feel” of the classroom as a result of children not only connecting to their own bodies and the “stories” lying in wait for them to explore, but also a softening towards each other in the sharing. In preparation for a challenging or stressful activity, such as a spelling or math test, a quick check in beforehand often helps find a place where the confidence was hiding and the anxiety could disappear. Self-esteem seems to be enhanced in a variety of ways when we observed the confidence growing.

CONNECTING THREADS OF EXPLORATION

When I was beginning to find ways to have Focusing spread throughout classrooms based on the rewards of my own experience, I was not yet connected to the Focusing Institute. I was a regional coordinator for the Bio Spiritual Institute and being encouraged to move forward and continue with my own explorations with children by Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell. Marianne Thompson, a mother in California, was certainly inspiring me as she had been walking that path with her own children, using Focusing with them from an early age. *The Little Bird*, written by Ed for Mary Ann’s daughter, has recently been published and is a marvelous tool to use with children. It is also available from the Focusing Institute’s bookstore online.

It was many years later when I connected with the Institute and found Marta Stapert, who was doing so much work with her husband, Ynse, to further this vision of having Focusing available for children in schools and at home. Little did I know that Mary McGuire, just up the road in my own country, was attempting to get into the schools and teach Focusing as a valuable tool for elementary classrooms. I am not certain, but had I had these contacts when I was just beginning to tentatively set foot on new ground, would the support of those others have been helpful to me to further and deepen my search in how to move Focusing further in schools? I do know that my experiences over the years, and those shared by other teachers and parents daring to use Focusing with children, would agree with me about some outcomes that I have learned to identify. It feels crucial that the sharing of our experience with others doing similar work is observed and acted upon.

OUTCOMES AND POSSIBILITIES

On one occasion, an incident in a classroom I was visiting demonstrates an outcome of using Focusing with a child. It was the second day of a new class; the children were 8 and 9 years old. It was recess time, and they were playing outside when I spied a boy with a very pointed stick and an angry look, threaten another child near the face. These children knew nothing about the “Elevator Rides” I had used regularly in my classroom, and I had no idea

what I planned to do. However, I asked the teacher to join me and decided my very strong felt sense would guide me. I had a major concern that the little boy could do harm from the look on his face. She took the one child out of harm's way as she told me that the day before there had been three incidents of conflict, each one escalating, with this particular child (whom I'll call Jason).

Jason turned to me and threatened to stab me. He was angry, hot, and sweaty. I reflected back to him what I was seeing. "My my, Jason, you are so hot and sweaty. It looks like you are very angry about something." He continued holding the stick and snarling at me, not wanting to back down. I stayed within three feet or so and gently worked towards standing beside him instead of in front. He was not letting that happen. He wanted to be in front of me, holding up his very pointed stick towards my face. I kept repeating over and over what I saw. "You are so hot and sweaty, Jason, and so angry."

I did have a compassionate tone of voice, although he did not know me at all.

As we were doing this little dance-like movement to alter positions, I told him I wanted to stay with him to keep him safe while he needed to be angry. He must have felt surprise that I never once asked for the stick. I knew I did not want to change anything — just to keep him company so that he could make the necessary change.

I repeated over and over what I saw. The importance of reflecting this back showed, as I began to sense the intensity of the situation slowly decreasing. Suddenly, he broke down sobbing.

The teacher who had kept the other children far from the scene saw this and went inside to retrieve Jason's teddy bear. (It had been a special day for all the children to bring in their favourite toy from when they were little.)

As soon as he saw his bear, he grabbed it angrily, buried his face into it and sat on the ground. The stick was lying beside him, and I sat down opposite him reflecting back to him how sad he seemed. He spent nearly two minutes crying loudly into this large well worn bear. With much anguish in his voice, he blurted out to me that the boy made him mad because he had touched his bear in the classroom. By now the rest of the class had been brought inside by the teacher. I sensed Jason was relieved not to be there with them. I asked if we could just sit quietly with his bear for a little while, and he nodded his agreement.

He moaned quietly, rocking back and forth and then his teacher came out. She reported to him in a frustrated voice, that his mother had been called because of the threat he had made to the other boy. She wanted him to know how serious his actions had been.

Jason's anger came back in an instant as he held his bear in one hand and grabbed the stick once more in the other. I signaled the teacher to stay and observe us.

Lucy: *Jason I see your anger came back.*

Jason: *Yes! He said angrily.*

Lucy: *Where is that anger living in your body?*

No response but his face was once again buried into the bear as he put the stick down.

Lucy: *Is your bear angry too?*

No response

Lucy: *Do you think the anger might be coming from inside your feet?*

No response

Lucy: *I wonder if it is in your tummy?*

No response

Lucy: *Well I wondered because sometimes when I get angry I feel it in my tummy.*

Jason: [His head shot up with all the anger he could muster, and he retorted loudly] ***It's in my hands!***

At this point I invited him to let me feel how his hands felt. He willingly reached them out to me with a gesture that did not show anger. I held them gently and told him I noticed how hot they were. We sat like that for quite some time as his hands became hotter and hotter. Then I decided to ask if he could let the anger go into my hands?

(I recalled two little boys in my kindergarten class had concluded their conflict one time by sitting face-to-face and holding hands. After a few minutes, the perpetrator announced he had let his new friend have his anger and the other boy had given him his sadness. "It went right out of our hands!" he had said with surprise and delight in his voice. They were the best of friends after that.)

Jason continued holding hands with me and nodded yes to my invitation. His face looked more sad than angry at this point. I reassured him that I could hold his anger and keep it for him so no one would get hurt. While we sat holding hands, they felt less hot, and Jason looked calmer. I continued reflecting back to him what I saw and what I felt.

Lucy: *Your hands do not seem so hot any more...*

Lucy: *Jason, you don't have that sweat dripping down your face any more.*

[He nodded his agreement.]

Lucy: *Jason, your hands don't feel so hot anymore. Is the anger all in my hands now?*

Jason: *Almost!*

I told him I would keep his anger for a while, and if he needed it back when he was going home, I could possibly give it back. He smiled gently while still holding my hands and said, "No thank you." That was when he released my hands. Jason announced in a composed manner that he wanted to go inside now, and so his teacher took him back in.

I spent the day visiting, and there were no more incidents. I was told the remainder of that week was also calm for Jason. I later learned he had struggled all that summer and much

of the first 5 months of school because of his parents separating and having a custody battle over him and his baby brother. The teacher was excited to learn something about the Focusing Attitude and listening to the felt sense. It became a support for her through subsequent situations in her class.

No matter the age of the child, it has been my observation that Focusing and experiencing the Felt Sense have offerings of forward movement even when the content or the issues are not obvious. There appears to be more self control over emotions that have potential to overwhelm children. There is a trust building that connecting to the body offers a child, desperate for some control, over a world of dependency, with few choices. The listening to their own bodies in this process seems also to allow for more independence as their trust grows. More respect for others and enhanced self worth become evident in the climate of the classroom. Problem solving also becomes less challenging because that in the framework of curriculum based issues or at a personal level as their confidence increases.

Children develop in ways that are physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. Focusing appears to affect some movement in their development in each of these areas. One teacher tells about a little boy who would ask on occasion, "I want to stay in with you at recess to do an Elevator Ride. Can I?"

He was 6 years old and inevitably would sit quietly for less than a minute and suddenly smack his hand rather loudly up against his forehead or his temple or sometimes at the back of his head. Then, he would sit and hold it where it landed. One could see him ease up bit by bit over the next 3, possibly 4 minutes. Then almost as suddenly he might say, "It's ok now, can I go out to play?" and all seemed to be well. Off he would go and that would be the end of it. The teacher's felt sense kept her from asking questions, but she was certainly curious.

One beautiful spring day the teacher was moved to ask him if he really needed to stay in. She told him she had some concerns with the way he smacked his head every time, and after all it was such a lovely day. He looked at her carefully and said, "But that is where my elevator takes me!" No more needed to be said.

As the school year came to a close the mother came in to tell the teacher that the little boy would not be able to finish out the year. She had moved into a shelter with her two children because of serious repeated physical abuse and traumas. She had grown brave enough after too many hits across the head, especially in front of the children. It was interesting that this little boy had never disclosed that part of his home life experience.

I share this story with a sense of mystery about how all that had happened affected change for this little boy. As long as he was in the class, there was never a situation involving his acting out with anger, bullying, or using physical violence. Could it be that those few minutes, whenever he needed to sit with someone who cared, was enough to process whatever emotions were being carried in his little body? My wish is to have some evidence-based projects. There is just so much potential here to study and create forward movement. That is my hope for our educational systems. However hope is not a strategy and that is what is called for today.

There have been many programs in schools helping to meet the needs of children that are so obviously calling out to be addressed. One such program is called Roots of Empathy that began here in Toronto. Begun by Mary Gordon, a kindergarten teacher with a vision to make a difference, the program now has international status. Coming out of her belief for making sustainable change happen for children, she felt that the schools were the right place to begin. Roots of Empathy involves visits to classrooms from kindergarten to Grade 8 for children to interact with an infant from the neighborhood. Over the course of the school year, the students get to know the baby and observe the changes that are visible between the ages of 2 or 4 months until they become 1 year old or more. The visits are an important catalyst for the program and the curriculum in which each of the grades is immersed. The program fits beautifully into the busy schedule of teachers and enhances all aspects of learning. The children learn something about different rates of development for individuals and are able to relate to the various stages. They can respect unique and individual differences and celebrate accomplishments. Through their observations and discussions they are learning and experiencing empathy. This is a wonderful template for finding a way to have Focusing enter into the elementary schools.

One teacher I know is using the felt sense within the program to take it further or to deepen the growing awareness and resonance to the child's own life. "How does it feel in your body when you are holding this baby? When the baby comes into the room where do you feel something inside you? When the baby leaves? When the baby cries?" What a grand way to introduce Focusing and then have it available for other times in the life of the classroom. How hopeful it would be if programs such as this one, successful and growing around the world, and those programs still waiting to be developed that involve Focusing, could become standard components of the educational setting globally.

Roots of Empathy has moved forward in this enterprise because there was a need and the need was addressed quite simply. Focusing can do the same if enough people want to share the vision and make it happen. It too, is simple and easy to incorporate into existing programs. I am encouraging those who have been doing Focusing, be it in the classroom or at home to begin sharing their experiences. Please go on to the discussion list and let us have the conversations we need to have world wide, so that our common vision can grow. (To post to the discussion list, send an email to: Focusing-Children@lists.focusinglists.org)

Now at this time with so many resources we are coming to a place of holistic learning where the whole child is being considered. Imagine how that could change the outcomes both during school life and after a student leaves school?

THE VERY YOUNG AS A GOOD PLACE TO START

Children younger than five and those who are preverbal need to experience the *Focusing Attitude* so that shifts can take place for them as early as possible. In some ways the child/toddler/baby is experienced by the adult as a felt sense is experienced, compassionately, empathically and lovingly without a quality of looking for a fix-it solution. The following is from Zach Boukydis who has done years of research and Focusing in particular with infants.

“The Focusing-Oriented approach is based on twenty-five years of clinical work and consultation on the parent-infant relationship, and extensive research on parent-infant interaction and the meaning system which develops between parents and infants. The approach is based on a model of empathic relations between parents and infants (Boukydis, 1982) which includes parents’ direct reference to their “felt sense” or bodily felt intuition in interactions with their infants; recovering the capacity to use bodily felt meaning in the relationship; and the importance of preverbal sensory and emotional communication between infant and parent. A whole method of practice for the Focusing-Oriented approach has been developed (Boukydis, 1990).”

This approach is worth reading about at www.focusing.org in the Children’s Corner for those who are interested to find out more.

The following is a story from a grandmother who learned Focusing and demonstrates here the “preverbal and sensory communication between infant and grandparent”. Here is the story in her own words as she shared it with me.

“My Focusing experience was with my little granddaughter around 18 months old and not yet speaking more than 4 to 6 words. She had been left with me on a Thursday morning as I usually looked after her during the day. However this time she was being left until Sunday evening. Nothing seemed to be a problem until bath time Saturday night. Suddenly, this naked little toddler did not wish to get into the bath tub. She leapt out and began to scream and throw around everything she could get her hands on. She attacked me with the toilet brush and tried to throw the plunger. I was flabbergasted and began to experience my own heartache, a physical tightness uncomfortably increasing as I was there trying to keep this little one safe from her own temper tantrum. She was wet and slippery and not wanting to be held. She struggled fiercely to get out of the confines of the bathroom.

I sat on the floor in front of the door and attended quietly to the heartache I was having. Immediately upon checking inside my body, the image of a large heavy sewer grate that had been lifted from its position came into my awareness. There was a sense that it was the symbol for anger that had been keeping some huge sadness from coming up and out. The size and the substance of this grate just seemed to match the size and substance of the temper tantrum unfolding. The meaning of the image came so suddenly that it surprised me to hear my voice say out loud, “You miss Mommy don’t you?”

The change was immediate as the toddler stopped the anger and dissolved into sobs and tears across my chest while I was sitting on the floor. I held her and cried with her for what seemed like a good ten minutes before there was a second shift. When the crying was over, she went into the bath without a word, to play with the toys there. She was even singing after a few minutes. There were no more incidents after that. The lack of language ability did not allow for any verbal follow up or explanations. It was enough to have been present and to state the problem out loud as it came from my Felt Sense. The response from the child affirmed that the correct words had been found even though they were not available to the child.”

FROM HOPE TO STRATEGY

“What the mind can conceive and what the mind can believe, the mind can achieve.” I do not know who first said those words but my felt sense fully agrees with them.

If and when our children have the benefits of Focusing, the world will be a different place from generation to generation. It may well be that what the world needs is to experience a paradigm shift, so hope for survival as a species and as a planet can be nurtured. Global peace can easily be conceived with the help of Focusing. It is with deep gratitude for the development of Focusing by Dr. Eugene Gendlin that this hope can be imagined within our grasp today. Please join me in finding some strategies in moving forward what has begun and with such momentum. I leave you to ponder my plea with some words from *The Prisoner* by Christopher Fry.

“...our time has come,
When wrong comes up to meet us everywhere.
Never to leave us,
till we take the greatest strides of soul we ever took...
...But what are we waiting for?
It takes a thousand years to wake.
But will you wake...for pity's sake?

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COMMUNITY WELLNESS FOCUSING A Work In Progress

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

This paper describes a process of ‘Community Wellness Focusing’, which began in 2000 for Nina Joy and Patricia. As with any beginning, we had to start from where we were and with the needs of those in front of us. It came by taking the step in front of us.

*“The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began...”*

Bilbo... used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary... ‘You step into the Road, and... there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to’” (Tolkien, 1965).

FIRST STEPS

When we started teaching Focusing to Afghan refugees, we didn’t jump half way around the world to do it. We were already in Pakistan. Patricia worked as a psychosocial technical advisor for an Afghan aid agency and Nina Joy accompanied her geologist husband. Nina was a novice Focuser when it came time to take that step out of her door, which led to sharing Focusing with people who didn’t know it yet. Patricia and some Afghans came looking for something helpful so we worked together to find the way forward. From that experience we know that one doesn’t have to be an expert to start sharing Focusing.

Not being experts helped. We had no choice but to work collaboratively with those who wanted to learn Focusing, to find how to share it in this new context. Our first attempt was a half-day workshop for Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (CHA), the Afghan aid organization that was employing Patricia. It turned into a full day when the director, Abdul Salaam Rahimy, experienced how valuable it was and asked us to continue for the rest of the day.

HURDLES

It may seem from this retelling that the beginning was smooth and easy. It was not. Over the next five months Nina Joy met with any workshop participant who wanted to practice, following an individual counseling model of Focusing. We didn’t know how to set up an ongoing program that would spread out. We found that Afghans weren’t comfortable Focusing in pairs unless one of us was the companion. So the mode of spreading Focusing that came from our learning experiences — teaching through workshops or to individuals, and

then encouraging people to continue practicing in pairs — wasn't going to work there. Fear of gossip, a strong motivating force for social control, seemed to be behind the reluctance to work in pairs.

Changes groups didn't work either. No one had the leisure or opportunity to meet in a group of their choosing outside of work hours. So how were they going to practice? We found they did Focus alone sometimes, but that wasn't going to keep Focusing alive nor encourage it to spread. Eventually, Patricia and our Afghan colleagues found that people preferred sitting in community or work place groups, being guided by a leader, while doing their own individual Focusing. They liked sharing in the group afterwards about the inner 'guests' they met [more on this below] and the changes that came in their lives. We also discovered they would teach family members and neighbors, who then could Focus with them. Community Focusing came naturally from the Afghan way of living.

Just as we were getting started with this very tentative process, Nina Joy left for the United States. When Patricia continued teaching, she felt very unsure, and often wondered if she was doing more damage than good. The first time a group fell apart in tears when imagining their gardens during a 'safe place' exercise that we had devised, Patricia worried that she hadn't protected them. We didn't yet know the power of the 'Guesthouse' metaphor, which we had discovered in literature by the Sufi poet Rumi, and had used from the first day. We started to learn its helpfulness as participants showed they felt safe even with strong emotions *when they were being* the 'guesthouse' for their 'inner guests' who had brought the tears. For more about Guesthouse Focusing, you can find articles and a slide show about the Afghan work on the Focusing Institute website.

BREAKTHROUGHS MAY NOT BE OBVIOUS

Patricia's experience in aid work and development, as well as community mental health training programs, gave us the background we needed for community training. She also found ways to put little parts of Focusing into psychosocial training for classroom teachers and gender awareness training for aid organization workers. This breakthrough of adding bits and pieces of Focusing training to other ongoing training projects didn't seem special to us at the time. Abdul Salam Rahimy, director of CHA, knew it was important and encouraged us to continue.

We had many concerns. Would Focusing get confused with other processes? Would Afghan people understand? Would Focusing people disapprove because we were teaching what we called Focusing, when it was a few bits of Focusing added to other kinds of training. Eugene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks Gendlin wrote us with questions about our methods of teaching using Rumi's Guesthouse poem. They were concerned that Afghans might think that Focusing was just discharging feelings. From what we saw, that wasn't happening, but we carried our own 'worried guests' about all this.

However, by the time Eugene Gendlin spoke at the Focusing Institute Summer School in August 2006, he saw this way of spreading Focusing as a major breakthrough.

“I have a wonderful quote from Afghanistan. I think that the work being done there is probably one of the most significant things happening right now.” (Gendlin, 2007).

NOT SPREADING AND SPREADING

Where we thought Focusing would first spread out into Afghanistan turned out to be wrong: it didn't stay with the CHA aid organization. Their health-related field programs and media groups we thought were poised to take it into all areas of Afghanistan were not able to do so, for safety reasons. However, the support of CHA was crucial, as it provided the chance to develop and test ways of collaborative teaching that work in Afghanistan.

Focusing began to spread when Patricia incorporated the techniques into an International Rescue Committee's teacher training program and manual (Omidian, P. and Papadopoulos, N., 2003). Focusing was also picked up by the Afghan Ministry of Education to be included in their teacher training. All the training was given in a participatory model that encouraged people to share what they learn in their families and communities, so this took the teaching further. Next, Patricia became the Country Representative for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, the Quakers) and from this platform was able to move forward with institutional support. Trainings in psychosocial wellness and Focusing became part of the AFSC Afghanistan program, with staff trained in Focusing, community participation, peace building, and psychosocial wellness. Jerry Conway from Birmingham, UK, came to Kabul for two and a half months, supported by The Focusing Institute, to help in the training. Internships were developed for students from the Psychology Department of the University of Kabul. These young people have been key in spreading the process outward. UNICEF provided two years of funding to test Focusing and psychosocial wellness models in domestic violence programs in rural communities. By incorporating Focusing into 'community-based wellness' programs, spreading the model became much easier.

COMMUNITY-BASED WELLNESS

Teaching Focusing to village communities is like sharing hygiene or agricultural techniques.

Community-based wellness is a public health approach that comes with a number of assumptions. The first is that most illnesses are preventable, including various types of mental illness. The second assumption is that the community itself contains many solutions to its own health needs and already has many resiliency techniques. Finally, health is best achieved when it comes through a partnership of local prevention and caring treatment, clinical referrals where necessary, and hospitalization as the last resort. Our work in Afghanistan is based on these assumptions.

According to the National Mental Health Directorate for the Ministry of Public Health in Afghanistan, over 65% of the adult population of the country is clinically depressed, with some reports placing the number as high as 98%. Yet, most individuals are functioning and

very few have the luxury to stop work — they meet their basic family obligations. Currently, there is only one Afghan psychiatrist working in the country and very few trained psychologists. International backup is very sparse. There are only three agencies that focus on mental illness. Their advisors are internationals on short-term contracts. Providing adequately for Afghan mental health through a primarily clinical approach is unlikely, given the lack of professionals and the security issues that exist.

Afghans' mental health problems commonly present as somaticized illnesses, and thus most mental health issues are dealt with at the local clinic, using the same medications that are prescribed for almost all complaints: antibiotics, pain relievers, vitamin B12 and diazepam (commonly known as valium). With most Afghans living in poverty, the money for such unnecessary medications is very dear. It means they have to forego some other necessity — like food or fuel. In addition, they use multiple local remedies, together with special diets, over the counter medication from the pharmacist without a doctor's advice, and visits to local healers or religious leaders.

In public health, when an illness affects a large percent of the population, it is assumed that a clinical approach would be inadequate to address the problem. To use the case of diarrhea as an example, if ten percent of the population of Texas (a state approximately the same size and with about the same population as Afghanistan) suffered from an outbreak of dysentery, public health officials would act in the following ways: 1) identify the cause of the illness in order to begin preventive measures; 2) treat most of the cases at the local level; and 3) refer the most severe cases to acute care hospitals (tertiary centers). Community measures would be sought to prevent further outbreaks of the illness. Reminders would be published regarding general hygiene and hand washing, proper handling of food and water. Within a short period of time the matter would be dealt with, and the remaining campaign would be one of prevention, probably including school health programs.

In contrast, Afghanistan, with its population of close to 30 million, most of whom live in rural areas and have limited access to any health care, cannot cope with any major outbreak of illness from a clinical approach. They struggle to contain polio, TB, malaria, leprosy, and maternal and child mortality. The scarce resources are spread very thin, and there are few qualified health providers for these dreaded diseases.

The situation for mental illness is much more dire, as the first round of funding by international donors excluded mental health. It is now on the agenda and is funded, but at low levels, with a focus on clinical care for the severely mentally ill. Yet, most women admitted to the small mental hospital in Kabul are there because they are depressed and or tried to commit suicide. Those with illnesses such as schizophrenia are often abandoned by their families, left untreated, and locked up in prison-like conditions for the rest of their lives. There is clearly a need for a wellness approach that relies on community-based services that are accessible, cheap, and replicable. Such services help prevent and treat illnesses such as depression at the local level, and help families to care for those who are ill.

It is because of these numbers and because of the acute need for a non-clinical approach that the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) office in Kabul, as well as

other groups, started programs for mental health promotion and illness prevention. AFSC's various activities target depression, war trauma and family violence through a program that combines resiliency and Focusing. The training approach is participatory and tailored to adult learners. Community participatory methods are used because they are proven to work. As with any public health issue, community work is not done as an alternative to clinical care, as if it is second best. It is done because it gives better results and is more cost effective.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Adults learn best within participatory processes that recognize their own knowledge, experiences, and capabilities. The web is full of sites for workshops, workbooks, and documents on this topic. One excellent example was developed for gender awareness trainings by OXFAM (UK). We recommend a search of the Internet to browse the possibilities. It is important to pay attention to methodologies that allow participants to think through their own answers, within cultural contexts that are familiar to them, and to come to group consensus in most cases. One of the formats for participatory/adult learning includes the "training of trainers" or TOT. In this model the learning style allows participants an opportunity to practice teaching as they learn new material.

Community participation is more than a training style; it is also an attitude that has a very important Focusing component. The attitude is one that assumes group processes carry with them a special dynamic that works best when people listen to their inner selves. Community participation means that one will not know the result of the process and should be willing to allow the group to work through whatever issues come before them, including community peace and justice or psychosocial wellness. As each person in the group brings to the group his or her own experiences, expertise and knowledge, Focusing allows the group to develop as a unit toward a common goal as they check inside and pay attention to their inner places. In Afghanistan we invite people to find their own state of being (that Cornell and McGavin call Presence, a state recognized in Islamic mysticism) that is without judgment, without bias, without goals. This helps them stay 'centered', and keeps egos at bay, allowing amazing things to happen in the group.

EXAMPLE: RESILIENCY, A GREEN STICK, AND A DRY STICK

An example of participatory learning is our module on resiliency. We often start our workshops with a discussion of resiliency, and since most of the Afghan languages don't have the word, we start with an illustration using two sticks, one fresh and green, the other dry and brittle. The dry stick represents someone who has had so many hardships in life that they don't think they can face another problem without feeling like they will be destroyed. The group talks about the hardships they and their neighbors have faced because of the many wars in their country: loss of home from rocket fire, death of family members, having to move to new locations to escape fighting, or fleeing the country to live as refugees.

The dry stick is bent a bit at each difficult thing they contribute, and the snap when it finally breaks illustrates what some people feel will happen to them when the next problem comes. Then we talk about resiliency, and of all the people we know who have survived and seem to be doing well. The green stick is bent a bit after each difficult thing is named again and shows that it does not break when it is bent even double. It represents resiliency as it returns to its normal state when the bending pressure is removed.

At this point the group of participants are divided into small working groups to brainstorm and list all the ways people in their society and culture show resiliency. If the group isn't literate, they gather the list orally or with pictures. The lists can be quite long. They are encouraged to find as many words as possible, without evaluating what is written. After about 10 minutes the small groups come back together and discuss what they have gathered. Afghans list such things as belief in Allah, hope for the future, ability to laugh and to cry, and the ability to help someone in need, as signs in their communities of someone who has resiliency. As we introduce Focusing to groups, we introduce it as a resiliency skill that helps them to remember their connection to Allah, and to touch into a full range of emotions in a safe way.

PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLNESS

In our training groups in Afghanistan, and now in Pakistan, we make use of positive adaptive models within the framework of psychosocial wellness. Psychosocial wellness is a concept in common usage among development fields, international aid work, and education. It is a resiliency model that holds that each individual is part of a community and needs both psychological wellness, as defined by that culture, and social connectedness in order to be a healthy person. In societies like Afghanistan, group connectedness is vital to mental wellness and trauma recovery. Studies by Miller et al. (2006) confirm this in research that shows those with the strongest social connections, in spite of traumatic events in their lives, are the least depressed and score in healthy ranges on various mental health tools. In our community training, in what we call the Level 1 class, we spend time on psychosocial wellness as a way to help people understand their bodies' physical reactions to stress and trauma, to find ways to help repair damage within social connections and to promote resiliency (Omidian, P. and Miller, K., 2006). We include activities and discussions on

- stress and stress reactions
- awareness of what is normal in their culture (such as ranges of hierarchy, individual decision-making, or group orientation)
- listening skills
- conflict resolution
- peace building

Much of this is introduced from a Focusing perspective, allowing participants to check inside to see what comes, before meeting in small groups to discuss the topics.

USE OF METAPHORS: LOCAL IMAGES, GARDEN, SAFE PLACE AND GUESTHOUSE

We feel that an important reason for the success of this way of teaching is the use of a locally recognized metaphor that is easily identified by the Afghan participants. Because it is a Muslim country, Islamic imagery and practices are used to help people feel comfortable and to sense the connections to which we refer. For example, in order to talk about “going to the center” we can refer to the *ayat* (verse) from the *Quran* that says: “God knows you better than you know yourself because He is closer to you than the vein in your neck.” This points to the connection to the divine within each person. And Afghans “know” that this is true, that they can find solace and a space for waiting inside. This use of local imagery and metaphors helps people connect Focusing to their own lives and places of meaning inside themselves.

Gardens have both metaphoric and real connections to Afghan culture. In the Quran, paradise is described as a garden of endless beauty, alive with flowers, trees and flowing rivers. We start the Focusing training with an invitation to go to a Safe Place inside. The process starts with an invitation to visualize a place that is calm, safe, and beautiful. Then we lead the group in a body scan that brings them into the center of their body. At this point we invite each person to bring that image of their safe place into their center and to sit there in that place. Most describe feeling relaxed and calm, some fall asleep. Those who cannot find that safe place inside the first time are reassured and encouraged. By the second day of the trainings, all participants have been able to find and be in their own safe place.

For Afghans, their safe place is often a garden or a place under a tree by a river. The Guesthouse is usually felt to be in front of this safe place. In a world as unsafe as Afghanistan, locating a place inside that gives refuge is important for most with whom we work. And Patricia is finding that it holds an important place for Pakistanis as well. This Safe Place allows the Focuser to find the connection to the divine, where infinite support can be found. From there they move into their Guesthouse.

The metaphor of the Guesthouse, with the place inside that is safe and beautiful, gives the space needed to hold whatever comes in a way that Cornell and McGavin call the “radical acceptance of everything,” with no goals, no bias, no judgment (Cornell, 2005). In Farsi this is: “*beh hadaf, beh taraf, bedune qazawat*”. It allows the Focuser to hold whatever comes in a kind and gentle way.

CULTURAL METAPHORS THAT FACILITATE FOCUSING

Many Focusing Teachers practice spotting natural Focusers. They are able to facilitate Focusing by helping people see, name, and strengthen their abilities. Focusing-oriented psychotherapists are trained to find the near-Focusing moments in the therapy hour and give space for these to unfold, gently inviting the person to slow down, take a pause, and sense inside instead of racing on with the story. We discovered we can do something similar for cultures when we find the cultural metaphors that encourage Focusing. In literature, poetry and religious practice over thousands of years, we can find reference to humans pausing and kindly paying attention to their inner process. These references can be supportive of

Focusing in a particular cultural context. One example is the poem we use to teach Focusing in Afghanistan. “The Guesthouse” was written over 700 years ago by the Sufi poet, Jalaludin Balkhi, known in the West as Rumi, known in Afghanistan as Maulana:

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond (Translation by Barks, C. and Moyne, J.
1997).*

We find metaphors that encourage Focusing have these characteristics:

- Pausing
- A big space
- Strong, gentle, curious awareness
- Sensing or noticing
- Allowing something to arise

In this way we can be with anything about our life situations, not getting identified with aspects of ourselves. The metaphor helps if it invites this strong, peaceful attitude around all the uneasy places and makes room for more to come about the whole situation. The Guesthouse metaphor fills this space for the Afghan, who values a guest as a gift from God. Rumi himself connected the metaphor of hospitality for guests to paying attention inside to inner “guests” that come in our bodies.

The Guesthouse metaphor has worked in communities that have a strong value of hospitality. It has now been used for seven years to teach Focusing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and more recently in Turkey. Afghans, like other people in high context cultures, live their lives continually making time and space for guests coming to their homes. They treat the guests honorably whether they like them or not. They know in their living tissues how to do this, so they can easily turn their kindness to guests inside themselves when they learn of this possibility. They can get quiet and spacious and kind even with big guests that can feel overwhelming. For more about Guesthouse Focusing find articles and a slide show about the Afghan work on the Focusing Institute website.

EXAMPLE:

Maybe someone feels, “I’M SO ANGRY I WANT TO KILL HIM!”

If they are using the Guesthouse metaphor they might then notice,

“Oh, maybe it is a guest rushing into my inner guesthouse. Ah, I can stop, and sit with it...”

The Focuser then sits and becomes the guesthouse and host for the angry guest. The inner felt sense of this metaphor can automatically bring a big enough space that anything else about the situation can come too. There is room for the violently angry part AND the part that cares about the other person, AND the part that doesn't want to end up in jail, for example. The Focuser sits, sensing/listening... knowing that a gift is coming, that a guest is a messenger from beyond. The Focuser receives what the guests want to tell or show. The whole situation may start to feel different in the body. The person becomes able to move forward in life, in ways that work better for everyone.

We are exploring to find metaphors that tend to facilitate the learning of Focusing for a whole group of people. Once a metaphor is found that helps the Focuser make space and hold what comes with kindness, we can anchor in that metaphor and collaborate with other people in that group to develop it further. In this way we can share focusing through something that is familiar and powerfully felt inside each person in the group.

EXAMPLE: THE NATIVE AMERICAN METAPHOR

Dr. Catherine Swan Reimer, an Inupiat, born in Katzebue, Alaska, now living in Portland, Oregon, developed a helpful metaphor during a Level 4 Focusing workshop with Nina Joy in April, 2008. As a psychologist, Reimer finds that a sense of deep belonging in the natural surroundings is still strong for herself and most Native Americans. Because of their own experience of the land around them when growing up, she and others can feel their own home place as a tundra, desert, or forest inside themselves. People can find space, peace and grounded strength in their bodies from sensing how they are in their natural place. In this attitude, they can invite into their awareness any animal, plant, wind, or other source of nature that might want to speak to them. In this natural setting they wait. Something may come or speak or show them something. Through this process they can listen, sense, describe and check with what comes, in a Focusing way.

Reimer uses the book, *Who Speaks for Wolf: a Native American Learning Story*, by Paula Underwood and Frank Howell. The story was passed down to Paula Underwood through five generations of her family's Native American tradition. It shows the importance of listening for all the animals that might have a message. This makes it an excellent metaphor for Focusing because it also encourages attending to the whole situation, not acting from partial awareness.

EXAMPLE: NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATIONS AND FOCUSING IN EL SALVADOR

Beatrice Blake tried to replicate our lesson plans in El Salvador, but found that using Marshall Rosenberg's Non-violent Communication seemed to work better in that culture. She now sees NVC as a potential door into Focusing. The NVC invitation to say one's own feelings and needs can make a pausing time and take people to that inner sensing process.

The Salvadorans were very receptive to learning skills to deal with conflict and enjoyed the lively and engaging NVC teaching aids that Beatrice shared. She intends to return to El Salvador to teach NVC as a door to Focusing, and to incorporate our use of culturally appropriate metaphors to help people understand the Focusing Attitude. (Further details can be found in the El Salvador Blog on the TFI website.)

In a similar manner, Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell use metaphors especially meaningful to Catholics and other Christians in Biospiritual Focusing, (McMahon and Campbell, 1997) and Rex Ambler finds ways of using Quaker metaphors that are helpful for Quakers (Ambler, 2002).

TEACHING FOCUSING THROUGH METAPHOR

Focusing can be taught through the use of metaphors. After reading the Guesthouse poem, we talk about the meanings it carries within the Focusing paradigm. We include:

- Safe Place
- Listening with no taking sides, no goals, no judgment
- How to sense inside and find inner guests
- How to spend time with guests in an inner listening way
- How to describe the guests and check the description with the guest
- How to find attitudes we are identified with, and invite them in as guests
- Other Focusing skills

EXPERIMENT FOR YOU TO TRY IF YOU WANT

People are experts in their own cultures and groups. It is important to take time to sense what could work for you and others. Working collaboratively in groups can support wellness for people and communities. We suggest that you might want to try this experiment to find a metaphor to use as a support for Focusing for yourself and others.

To start you might want to center as you usually do for Focusing and then invite a felt sense of each of these qualities or actions:

- pausing...
- a big, inclusive space...
- strong, gentle, curious awareness...
- sensing or noticing...
- allowing something to arise...

Then you could invite an ordinary life situation to come into your awareness that would bring these sensations in you...

Wait and when something comes you could explore it, sense it, describe it...

When it feels right, you might want to try it as a container for Focusing.

EXAMPLE: THE JAZZ JAM SESSION METAPHOR

In a workshop sponsored by The Focusing Institute at Garrison, New York, June 20-22, 2008, 'Focusing and Psychosocial Wellness: A Community Resiliency Approach to Working with Trauma', we experimented in the above way with finding helpful metaphors that might speak in the cultures of the international participants.

When Nonie Potocki from New York gave that invitation to herself, she found a jazz jam session place where there was time for pausing, a friendly space for waiting with interest and goodwill to see who showed up. Anyone could come and bring their instruments. All were welcome. In experimenting with this herself, she said what came most easily to her was the whole feel of the music that was played.

(Nina Joy's voice)

I tried using the metaphor that Nonie discovered as a Focusing metaphor for myself. I sensed myself being at the same time the jam session space and also the listener that hears in an accepting and interested way. I waited for what might show up. Something came like the beating of a steady drum, with the words "take a break, take a break, take a break..."

So I acknowledged the player in me that really wanted me to take a break from writing. I waited for more... A slow, low cello feeling came, showing me how tired something in me was. I said hello to that, and stayed with it a bit. I sensed something else, a background of ... oh my gosh! ... a steamroller type thing, rolling over everything else, with a huge intent to just keeping on working! It felt like a dull, insistent roar in my body. Oh, hello to you too...

As I was checking the description back with that sense in my body, it shifted. It was not a steamroller anymore, but the pushing-gushing strain of birthing. Ahhhh ok. Suddenly I felt free to take a break from writing this article, knowing the creative process won't get lost. It will be here when I get back. The jazz jam session place certainly worked as a metaphor to support my Focusing.

WHERE FROM HERE?

As we experiment with finding metaphors that work for whole groups, we experience that they are not as widely effective in cultures that value individual identity more than group identity. At the same time, we notice people in individually oriented cultures like those in Western societies, do continue to belong to and value groups. Metaphors that speak to groups within a culture can be found that may help when inviting people of those groups into Focusing.

We would like to encourage Focusing people to look around in their own communities and see where they might feel drawn to offer Focusing in functioning, ongoing groups. Many Focusing Trainers are already doing this. We would like to broaden the effort to include more of us, since we have experienced that novice Focusers can also begin to share Focusing effectively if it is done collaboratively. What steps might be in front of you?

The steps right in front of us now are completing a manual on the Community Wellness Focusing approach, and responding to requests for this way of teaching. These have recently come from people in Turkey, Kenya, Croatia, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Iraq, Canada, China, Indonesia and other places.

During the Garrison workshop referred to above, a wonderful international support group, the 'Community Focusing Lab', was developed collaboratively. We support each other in taking Focusing into our communities in a psychosocial wellness way. The formation of the lab is another example of co-creation, the collaboration basic to this approach. We meet in phone conference once a month, have small working groups in between, and let each other know what we are doing through e-mail and a blog. One of the small working groups has gathered around encouraging and helping the manual become a reality.

CONCLUSION

This process of community Focusing and the use of metaphor has been slow and very discouraging at times. It is only with hindsight that we can see the amazing direction from which we have come. Neither of us had any expectations when we started, except to help Afghans cope with lives as refugees. We had no idea how far it would go, but we knew it was a path worth walking.

*"The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say" (Tolkien, 1965).*

Bilbo and Frodo were little, ordinary folks, who took small steps. With lots of help from all kinds of *other* beings, together they accomplished a huge undertaking that healed Middle Earth. Many of us little, ordinary people are taking Focusing into different niches of our own societies, and different areas of the world. We are grateful for the efforts of each one and all the supporting people also. We are all doing this together, and the journey continues.

ENDNOTE

We appreciate Eugene Gendlin, the philosophy wizard, who found this ancient process happening and described it for our time, and who has so enthusiastically supported our

work. Gratitude we send also to Mary Hendricks Gendlin for her encouragement from the beginning. Very special thanks to Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin for the Inner Relationship Focusing that is the basis of our work.

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PART 4

PERSONAL JOURNEYS



PARTNERSHIP, FRIENDSHIP AND MENTORING

Thérèse Fortier and Solange St. Pierre

We believe that it will be of interest, to share what a difference our partnership experience has made to various levels of our personal development. We have something valuable to convey, in order to encourage this practice as a way to touch what is needed to fully express ourselves as human beings. We also want to illustrate from our experience how a Focusing Partnership can be a wonderful, enriching relationship tool.

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Thérèse

My name is Thérèse Fortier. I am 82 years old and retired from teaching a few years ago. Many people from the Focusing community know that I have been suffering from Parkinson's disease since 1996. I also suffer from chronic back pain. I did not find relief in spite of all the treatments that I tried. And so I had to resign myself to taking pills for the rest of my life and staying at home with my feet glued to the floor. I often feel isolated and sad to see that my end is approaching. My disease cannot be cured, and the symptoms can only worsen. It is a degenerative disease, and we do not know which symptoms are the next on the list: difficulty swallowing... no longer being able to write... *Life* is escaping by small steps. Sometimes I imagine myself leaving here to go into palliative care... no longer to be able to come back.

It seems to me, having lived through various stages of loneliness — that I actually feel less lonely. I have learned. I have found my way by small steps... gradually. Focusing by Focusing, I desensitized myself to the panic and fear of loneliness. Now a part of me feels less panicked, less jammed. Spending a day alone at home is no longer a tragedy. The anxiety associated with the disease is still present, but it does not persist so long. Sometimes I do not know that I am anxious, but my belly is bad. When I bring my attention to it, the belly tells its own story. I know that my problems are fixed in my body, but I am less prone to dramatizing them so assiduously, and I can say that this gift comes from a long listening relationship to my inner world, which has often been assisted by my partner's benevolent presence.

I met Solange in the summer of 2002. At the end of an intensive training, where I was present as a volunteer, I shared with the group my deep desire to find someone who would like to form a partnership with me. Then, to my greatest satisfaction, Solange St. Pierre raised her hand and said, "I would be honoured to be your partner." That was the beginning of our adventure.

My body relaxed deeply. Let me tell you how happy I was. I asked her, "Why not start right away?" We are now in our sixth year of sharing our experience (mostly on the phone because we live more than a hundred kilometres from each other.) In the beginning, Solange, who lives in Montreal, came to my place, Trois-Rivières, so that we could get to know each

other a little better. Our first meeting took place in August 2002. Since then, we have missed only few weeks, when Solange has taken holidays and workshops.

Writing to you about the beginning of our relationship and the fact that we have been very constant gives me a warm feeling of happiness and solidity. I have been searching for a soul mate all my life. I am now 82 years old, and I am proud to say, "I harvest what I have sowed!"

The most important benefit we have noticed from this experience is our inside transformation. Our total mutual involvement has led to remarkable changes. Moreover, through this magic tool of weekly Focusing, I can see clearly that in addition to having tamed both my loneliness and illness, I came a long way in all my intra and interpersonal relationships.

Yes, of course, the little anxious Thérèse is still there, but being attentive to my internal process allows me to take care of every little feeling and all the physical sensations that accompany them. Slowly, with the empathic listening of Solange, in the half-hour allotted to me, I find an opportunity to transform my anxious lifestyle. I can say that in contact with my friends or my family I feel more assured, and I can sense a certain inner quietness. I am stronger. I have fewer doubts about my emotions and my perceptions. I feel more confident inside me about what I have to say. For example, it happened that I let go of certain people with whom I had believed myself to be in intimate relationship.

Through being available for this kind of experience, this weekly reserved time, I was helped to discover that the implicit is always there. My breathing tells me that I feel good. Gradually, step-by-step, the many problems towards which I turn my attention are shifting. I feel a great wellness when I write this. I know that during the last three or four years, something in me is feeling better. I appreciate my relationship with Solange. I must say that this relationship differs from all other relationships that I have experienced. Having this constant listening and sharing with one another without giving our opinion, has led us to an intimate relationship of friendship. The clarity of this flexible, transparent and authentic relationship allows me to live in a more relaxed way.

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Solange

Reading what Thérèse has written here, touches me deeply because I know her very well. I know her concern for transparency and authenticity, and I found it in her writing. Our history is worth telling because it is a beautiful one. It is the story of two women passionate about Focusing, who attempted the adventure of a kind of intimacy that few friendships reach.

I am 55 years old. Thérèse could be my mother, but our relationship did not look like a mother-daughter relationship. I remember a Focusing session at the beginning of our exchange. I had made the trip to Trois-Rivières because I did not feel at ease with an exchange by telephone. Sitting on the couch, I started to come into my inner world, and I was taking things from my childhood, these old things/places that had never been listened to. I felt this great solicitude for the little girl that I had been, and it was so good to finally be heard. In turn, I listened to Thérèse and... magically... her little *inside* girl vibrated at the same pace

as mine. I had the feeling of being in the schoolyard with her. I had the certainty that if I had met Thérèse when we were both six years old, we would have experienced great epics. This sense of complicity and joy shared by two children, sensitive, curious and mischievous, has always been present in my relationship with Thérèse.

In our six years of productive partnership, I made many discoveries about the mysteries of relationship as well as those of Focusing. These discoveries open doors and lead to surprising pathways *inside*, full of treasure and fresh insight. We have widely explored our child's wounds, our loves and friendships' sorrow, and our anxieties facing the unexpected and difficulties of our actual lives. Our friendship has grown from our Focusing partnership — and — a few times Focusing was needed to explore different aspects of that relationship. We did so to the best of our knowledge, with Janet Klein's model.

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Thérèse

It happened to me last year, that I was feeling sadness about some uncomfortable aspects of our relationship. On Tuesday evening, during our usual exchange, I proposed to Solange an "Interactive Focusing" session. She said, "Yes, of course."

Solange is the type of person who does not always answer the phone and who does not return messages quickly. She needs withdrawal, to remain alone for long periods. My needs are different. When I feel alone, sometimes it becomes too heavy, and I need someone to respond immediately to my call. Because we are different, our relationship brings discomfort, such as may occur in any human relationship. In this particular context, it seemed to me that the discomfort could not be ignored or set aside. I had no choice. I had to talk about that discomfort so that it could be heard. It was too present, too close. I felt a blockage, a regression to my old patterns. This time was not very sweet, not very happy.

With empathic words, my partner then helped me to go along these pathways that I know well, in these internal places, where I had often been, without development or transformation. This half-hour during which I heard myself talking about our relationship enabled the implicit to emerge, and I became a creator of a new part of Thérèse. This part of me can say a thing as it arises, thereby allowing the relationship to evolve and transform itself. This process brings new attitudes, and then new behaviours follow.

I want to say that this type of communication between us has allowed our relationship to become closer. Relationship-Focusing as we practice it is a wonderful way to heal conflicts and increase intimacy.

Two or three years ago, some friends said to me, "Mon dieu, Thérèse, you've changed." And when I think about *all that*, Gene's paper — which staggered me in 1976, came back in my memory. This paper, "A Theory of Personality Change" translated by Fernand Roussel, and used at the Montreal Interdisciplinary Centre (MIC), introduced me to Gene's theory on transformation through Focusing.¹

I must say that before undertaking my beautiful and transformative journey through Focusing, I first learned humanistic psychology with Yves St-Arnaud and had built upon it as a basis for learning. Gene Gendlin and Yves St-Arnaud are two psychological humanists.

Recognizing that I learned from these two great and gifted masters who have great influence in the world of psychology makes me proud to be among their students. I cannot keep all that just for myself. Hum! I could say that my felt sense is “spacious” in my belly right now. Saying: “a need to expand... to grow”

I need to make this digression, to name all of these milestones on my journey. It is like being in a Focusing process right now. The moment opened, and I spontaneously touched in this article all that was *underneath*. I touched what it was that *carried forward* the level of my personal transformation. According to some schools, the personality does not change. Gene brought something else, and it touched me. I needed to know that a transformation of the human person was possible, and that this transformation could be achieved through Focusing. I also know now that it is important to practice Focusing on my own, in order to subsequently be a Focusing partner, as I am with Solange. I needed first to experience the inner process, then be able to go further — being accompanied by someone else.

.....

Solange

Now I see three distinct stages in our journey that have been described by Thérèse. The first is that we had to live the process on our own and recognize it internally. The second is the ability to go into that place inside of you, where you are able to listen to yourself being accompanied by someone. And the third is to open a transformational space for the relationship that is being built between the two people — this opening leading to changes in all of our relationships.

I had to do all these steps one by one to really understand their profound meaning. The last step is “relational Focusing” where two people are evolving in a relational environment. However, all these steps go together and influence each other. We have to keep an eye on each. Now, I better realize the difficulty of practicing partnership early in the training. The place inside is too fragile, too weak, to allow someone a little awkward to *go there*. I understand why it is so important to recommend to beginners only to reflect back, and just be present and attentive. It is also clear to me that two people already initiated into the world of Focusing are doing *something more* in their exchanges, especially when these exchanges will continue over a long period. Maybe *the more* is contained in the knowing the rich texture of the implicit.

There is now another important aspect that I want to emphasize, and which derives for me from a sustained partnership practice. I am of course talking about coaching someone in a new path, this opening towards a new life direction leading “elsewhere”. I am talking about mentoring. When I decided to become a Co-ordinator for the Focusing Institute, I asked Thérèse to accompany me in this direction. I could have chosen another mentor. I looked at different possibilities and the inner voice was always saying internally, “No... I really need someone who knows me from the inside... someone who knows my issues... holes where I fall... round about way... meandering and blockages, which I have to face.” The mentoring process began therefore, a long time before the big step was there in a concrete way. For example, I remember coming back from my Weeklong Certification with a few books that I did not even feel able to read, because all were written in English. I felt like a poor child in

front of the window of a candy store. It looks so good, but it was not for me. Thérèse, because she had already been on this path, totally understood the great difficulty of being part of a network where everything goes into another language.

I wanted to teach Focusing “for all”, and I wanted to teach it other ways than the oral tradition. I needed French material. I started to read some books, page by page, with my dictionary. With great perseverance, I finally got to where I wanted to be, and was able to develop all the material I needed to teach the primary level that is usually provided by trainers. From there, I was able to teach in French, but I did not feel attached at all to the Institute, and I was thinking, as many others had done before me, not to renew my membership. I felt different, isolated and marginal (At the time, I called this “my homeless feeling”). I could not find my niche within the Institute. I would certainly have abandoned it, if I had not discovered, again with the help of Thérèse, Gene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks’ writings about their great desire to see Focusing evolving in a social and community form.²

Thérèse, listening to me week after week when I was sharing... *all about my sense of isolation*, began to send me some e-mails from the Co-ordinator’s List. One day in 2005, she sent to me an invitation from Robert Lee addressing emerging teachers who were able to start teaching after Certification. Thérèse told me, “Read it. It could be interesting for you.” I was completely shocked. Of course, I was interested, but how would I share with other teachers in this language — which I was then able to read, but did not speak? With many, many rounds of listening and encouragement, I finally climbed the mountain that initially seemed insurmountable. I went to Stony Point in 2005, and I came back with the idea of being able one day to teach my own Certification program developed from a social and community perspective.

I cannot remember all of the details, but I know that things have changed. I named my “macro” (according to the teachings of Robert Lee), and I worked on it in my own way with the support and listening of Thérèse. I confronted my fears one by one. I took one step after another. I found my way in the maze of my sorrow. I also discovered wonderful people with whom I have sometimes exchanged a few words, and whose ideas and practices of expansion and spreading Focusing deeply nourished and inspired me.³

The most important gift I have received in all this adventure was to recognize the power of that kind of support: partnership every week in a Focusing way. I am proud of the entire journey. Some difficulties are still present, and I recognize them when they emerge. I often need to return to the core and once again feel the movement of growth that is coming from inside. And I found, in each Focusing session with Thérèse listening, this feeling that someone is *knowingly* listening to me through each silence, each node, and each new little step, ready to recognize what is there — simply and without any pressure.

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Thérèse

I know that partnership is a way to bring someone somewhere (although we do not know in advance where it goes)... and certainly do not want to stop it. It was for me, and it continues to be, the way of a good and beautiful friendship and a way of finding acceptance of who I am.

After all these years of learning, searching and teaching in the field of helping relationships, I was looking for someone with an open mind. That is what I had in my mind when I looked for a partner.

When Solange and I began our weekly exchange, I walked on tiptoes, listening to her problems and difficulties with great respect. I was witnessing her way of seeing things and studying them. Sometimes silently, as if I read between the lines, I listened with great attention. I realized that this steady relationship had become, for both of us, a relationship of friendship between two people with an open mind. And that was exactly what I was looking for.

As I write these lines, I can say that I am, once again (at this time) in a period of doubt. I doubt the transformation. Have I really changed? I feel the lack again. I need to pause, to see if I can make one more step to get out of this discomfort. I do not want to remain mired in doubt, nor put *me* aside... abandon myself silenced, or even leave the relationship. Things need to be said in order to continue, and I have enough confidence in the strength of our relationship to say them (and even explore being listened to by someone else, if needed). Yes, I can say that I am no longer in the same place. I can express what I need without hanging to it... and move on to something else.

I do not even know how I became “mentoring Solange”. However, I can say that this part of our experience seems to me a wonderful opportunity. The adventure helps and stimulates me, among other things, to continue to clarify and articulate my own understanding of Gendlin’s philosophy. I continue to learn, to understand, and to follow the latest developments in the world of Focusing because Solange, speaking now what we call the “Bad English”, is able to attend Co-ordinators Meetings, as well as various workshops led by the Focusing Institute. I think I can say that this is a mutual support. There is something precious in seeing the way these people carry things. Gene has this ability to always be enriched through contact with people because he respects and welcomes the inner richness of each person. I think that is what he calls the “First Person Science”.

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Solange

We can say that partnership, friendship, and mentoring are three different threads in the fabric that weaves human relations. They are three different concepts or three separate units in the unit model, but influence one another in the field of the Implicit.

Partnership is defined as a listening-shared-time between two people in which each person is entirely free to explore whatever they want to explore from their inner world, using the tool of Focusing. Therefore, there is a certain structure and rules to be observed so the experience can be called “partnership”. We have always followed these rules with great respect, having finally found a very deep level of connection that has great value. When we turned the experience into “Interactive Focusing”, we did it only for a given period. However, we want to emphasize the uniqueness of each partnership experience, and we invite you to see the color (texture or form) of your partnership. Is there a word... or an emotional quality that might suit your own partnership experience?

Friendship is an unfolding feeling between two human beings recognizing their essence. We can only praise again this so rich form of human relationship. We realized that the framework that we have offered here for a sustained partnership practice has opened a space and deeply fed it. Because Focusing enables us to reach the essence of human being, it makes a space conducive to sharing and communion. In International workshops, there is often a feeling of deep connection that emerges between two people when they participate in a Focusing exchange. This feeling — which lets us see and recognize another person from their *inner being* — continues to exist for a long time after.

Mentoring is guiding someone on a path already traveled — and the less experienced one is ready to follow. This aspect, which was not provided to us initially, emerged spontaneously throughout our journey. The one who has already travelled the road respects the other's need to do it differently. The mentoring is done without intrusion and without agenda, always respecting the spirit of Focusing and its egalitarian model. This guiding model is also integrated into the new Certification program under the mentorship (model).⁴ Each student may follow his or her own path. Each one can design and build her/his own unique and original “Practice Project”, being accompanied throughout the training by Focusing and TAE tools. The model and our way of working recall the teaching of small country schools, where all students are in the same class and the teacher is often not much older or much more advanced in knowing than the students. We learn together with pleasure from the richness of everyone.

ENDNOTES

1. The Montreal Interdisciplinary Center, specializing in humanistic psychology, social psychology and organizational development, was created in 1969 by the team of the psychologist and consultant in human relations, Yves St-Arnaud (Yves St-Arnaud is also founder of Department of Psychology at the University of Sherbrooke). I worked for the centre from 1970 to 1981, and I met Gene Gendlin for the first time in 1986.
2. I want to mention “The Politics of Giving Therapy Away: Listening and Focusing” (GOL 2056), “Bringing Focusing in a Political Context” (Conference call published in *Staying in Focus*) and two papers from Mary Hendricks: “Grass Root Globalisation: Creating Free, Self Organising Spaces in The Social Body” (Keynotes address given at the 17th International Focusing Conference, Toronto, May 2005) and “A Focusing Group: Model for a New Kind of Group Process”. I had translated each of them because it seemed important to me to understand this particular aspect of spreading Focusing as a social practice, because this is what I want to do.
3. I think in particular of Robert Lee and Rob Foxcroft, and more recently, of Patricia Omidian, Nina Joy Lawrence, Beatrice Blake and Herbert Rice (*Focusing and Psycho-social Wellness*, Garrison 2008).
4. This program is available (in French and in PDF) at www.focusingquebec.qc.ca (Solange St. Pierre)



DOING THE THING YOU LOVE

*Rob Foxcroft
for Bala Jaison*

ABSTRACT

The feeling of love has immense traction upon the soul.

The waters of our lives fall naturally into one flow, once love for some one thing has its uniting effect upon our experience of agency. We can't direct our lives by words which others let fall behind them. It can't be done. The words are dead wood. Rather, we act when the sap rises. We are drawn forward or swept into action by what rises from our roots. This is the disinterested fact of love. Up to a point, it doesn't much matter what we love, provided the stream is limpid.

It is through a naturally emergent process of Focusing that we come into contact with our loving, and that love holds its sway over our lives.¹

*I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.*
— W B Yeats

*Some say an army on horseback,
some say on foot, and some say ships,
are the most beautiful things
on this black earth, but I say
it is whatever you love.*

— Sappho,
translated by Stanley Lombardo²

1. A woman sat down with me for a first Focusing session. "Is there," she said, "a way to do this that isn't hippy-dippy?"

So we looked about a little, and we found two things. Hippy-dippy has to do with wrapping yourself up in a private world of comfort, and has to do with digging up the dead.

She said, "I'm very good at digging up the dead."

So we made a Zero Zombies Zone. I put it to her, as I put it to you, that Focusing need not be about going to painful places, or dwelling there in love or hope or grief. Focusing can be about doing the thing you love.

I wondered what she loves, and what would make more of that.

She said, “I am completely uncreative.” I said, “Well, that’s a good sign.”

She looked a little startled at this. It seemed I’d better say something more: “How come a voice would tell you with such acrid emphasis, ‘You have nothing to say’, unless in fact you did have something to say?” — “Oh”, she said, “Oh. Now that’s a new way to look at it.”

She said, “I made a beautiful stained glass window, and I mounted it in my kitchen door where people can see it.”

I said, “That’s wonderful. I hear from people who hide their work for twenty years.” — “Do they?” she asked. Indeed they do.

I said a few words about how people use various strategies to deal with “rancour” (the name I use for that persistent putting-down voice of energy) which cramps or block your creative power.

She said, “When I’m driving, stories come. I never write them down.”

I hazarded a guess: “You have a dream so vivid you could never, ever forget it, and then you go to the bathroom, and bye-bye dream, it’s gone forever.” Yes, just like that.

“But I could record myself when I’m driving.” She might try that.

She said: “I always try so hard.” I said, “You need this to be something which happens without any conscious effort.” She said, “Yes. Yes. I like that. I’d like to have something in my life which would happen without any conscious effort.”

These early stages, as a person begins to love the thing she loves, are frail and delicate. There are many ways to leave the path. It may be a while before there is a clear path.

“This isn’t what I expected,” she ended. “It isn’t what I came for. When can I come again?” We both laughed. I felt I had found a friend.

She had found a place which held both panic and excitement. She could go back to that place. Clearly it was time for the music to form a cadence.³

2. Now, one of the things I want to say to you is that, unlike psychotherapy, which perhaps should not go on for ever and ever, keeping company with a person whilst she is doing the thing she loves might on occasion be a lifelong thing.

My “oldest inhabitant”, the person to whom I have given piano lessons for the longest time, has been with me now for twenty-nine years. There are many things too private to write here, things all but unspoken or unsayable, ways in which piano-playing has illuminated his life and love, and been a place of peace at various times of trouble.

All I want to point to just now is the permanence of the relationship. There are relationships in our lives which should not be forever; others, which are essentially, like the mating of pigeons, a lifelong affair.

I have now a number of people in my life who have taken it for granted from their earliest memories that they would study piano-playing with me; for whom my presence in

their lives is a bare fact like the sky. Eleanor I met in the spring of 1980, when she was just two years old. Now she is licensed to be at the helm of a battleship. Our friendship is not quite as it was when I used to sit on the end of her bed reading stories.

Ailish gave me an old-fashioned look yesterday. Ailish is eleven by now, I suppose. But in many ways she's more grown up than I am. I was being very silly, pretending to stab her with a pencil. "I know I'm going to be a doctor," she said austerely, "but right now I'm still squeamish." We laughed and went back to our Bartók.

3. Cleo Nordi danced with Pavlova. She had a curious power to transmit some of the magic of that great dancer to a later age. ("My dear," said the all-too-audible old lady, as Pavlova was dancing *The Dying Swan* in Edinburgh, "isn't she *awfully* like Mrs Wishart?") I remember how, each time Peter Darrell created a new role for Elaine Macdonald, Elaine would whisk herself away to London to go through it with Cleo, and come back miraculously transformed: precise, strong, fluid, elegant, frail, and infinitely touching.

So long as Elaine was dancing, she would of course wish Peter to be there on one side, Cleo on the other.

Anna Paskevka writes:

I rely primarily on Legat's precepts as taught by Cleo Nordi. This is a system of educating the body and mind that optimizes the body's ability to move and the mind's ability to discover the logic within motions. Classical ballet can then be understood in terms of its dynamics and physics, avoiding dogma, thus recognizing it as a living and evolving art form.

This approach acknowledges both the range of motion available to us and the relationship with the space in which we move. The system's most salient features are the recognition of gravity's impact on motion, and the inclusion of the potential of the spine to spiral, expressed in the use of épaulement.⁴

Once I watched Elaine coaching Judy Mohekey: making fine, precisely focused physical suggestions about the balance and movement of the spine, the extension of the arms; about the placing of the fingers, the angle of the foot; little things, often, which one could scarce imagine being visible from out front.

I said to Elaine: "Isn't it true, that if you enter deeply enough into the feel and sense of the role, you will find the right quality for the steps?" She looked at me quite sharply, a little sideways. "You can take that too far," she said. "Don't forget that when you find the exact movement, it can't fail to take you into the heart of the role. It goes both ways. You miss something when you forget that."

Yes. It's like that in piano-playing, too. It's not enough to hear the notes. You must hear also the fine play of overtones, as one note reacts with another. There is magic there. Debussy said, "I have just been exploring the latest discoveries in harmonic chemistry." Thus from sensory detail, mood and meaning forms.

I remember Peter clutching me as he was watching Elaine dance: “Those arms! Look at those arms!” He had tears in his eyes. Who would not?

The day I watched Elaine coaching Judy, the work was *Five Rückert Songs*, a ballet about love and loss, to songs by Gustav Mahler, conceived in the anguish and bewilderment of a broken spirit:

The poem is by Friedrich Rückert:⁵

If you love me for beauty’s sake,
oh, do not love me!
Love the sun,
she has such golden hair!

If you love me for youth’s sake,
oh, do not love me!
Love the spring,
who is young every year!

If you love me for treasure,
oh, do not love me!
Love the mermaid,
whose many pearls are clear!

If you love me for love’s sake,
Yes then, love me,
Love me always, forever,
As I love you always, forever.

“If you love me for love’s sake...”

And I think there is one thing, more than any other, which fouls our dancing, writing, gardening or piano-playing. It is when there is something we love to do, yet we cease to love it for love’s sake. It is when the thing you love becomes something you do to win applause; or in order to run away from your life; or in some sense, *faute de mieux*.

It is, alas, too easy to betray the one you love.

4. There are, I think, three things here: the thing you love, the person you love, and your love for yourself. Mostly I am writing here about the first of these; but it will be as well to say a few words about each in turn:

The thing you love

We cannot direct our lives by moral principles, which come from outside ourselves. In that form, the form of reason or law, they have no purchase on our power of agency, our natural motive power. We need to be drawn forward or impelled into action by feelings of love.

We love many things: gardening or justice; football or meditation; Athens or dinner-parties; Experiential Focusing or the Differential Calculus. Up to a point, it doesn't much matter what you love, provided the stream is limpid.

Though naturally, if you have the great misfortune to love something which is evil, which is in some sense ruinous or corrupting, then you do indeed have a problem.

Suppose for a moment that there is a guy who finds that he loves to torture people. ("They say the Beast of Belsen had a beautiful home life.") I am asking you to think of him as being appalled by this joy, which he finds in himself; but at the same time, as recognising in himself that it is (at least on the face of it) a genuine love. (Are there not a great many of these guys about? In Beijing? In Singapore? In Riyadh? In Guantánamo? Or for that matter, in Washington or Geneva, since the power-holder may feel no need to be personally present, in a gross or vulgar way.)

You will grasp two points at once: one is that the guy has fallen into a very serious predicament, since the feeling of love has immense traction upon his soul; the other, that there are vanishingly few people to whom he can turn for help. Of those very few, I surmise that almost none will be psychotherapists. Most will be artists, some of whom do know how to transcend the unthinkable, to lean into some kind of redemption at (what we vaguely call) "a higher level" — meaning, through art or music, words or images.

Let's leave these troubled waters, and return to dry land.

In ordinary cases, the waters of our lives fall naturally into one flow, once love for some one thing has its uniting effect upon our experience of agency. It brings together impulses and energies which were formerly scattered, or were dispersed in boring forms of time-wasting.

Once we are at one, through doing the thing we love, what need is there of digging up the dead?

The person you love

Doing the thing you love may come between you and the person you love. Or may give you needed space from one another. Or may be the vehicle for your love of one another.

I shall say something about the last two of these possibilities, which are what I mostly live with in my work. Children who learn the piano do well if there is a parent around who knows when music is a vehicle for being together, and when it is a vehicle for growing independence. This is elusive ground. We need not feel surprised that we often make a mess of crossing it.

One sees at once that the answers may not lie in teaching the child Focusing. Perhaps the child has Focusing already? Perhaps asking the child to go inside would be indelicate or intrusive?

But the parent falls naturally into a kind of Focusing, because the intricacies of the dance are intangible, and the dance is on shifting ground.

Another metaphor. When the fire flickers, we look around, either for fuel, or to see what is dowsing it. So I never say, "It will help if I teach you Focusing." But I myself am

making the turn to Focusing, because the forward movement is stopped. And that turn is contagious. People catch it from you.

I hear: “He’s doing so much better at school, since he came to you.”

I ask a boy: “How’re you doing?” — “Fine.” — “Ay, right.” (Privately, I don’t believe him.) I ask, “So on a scale from zero to ten, how fine are you?” — “Four.” — “Aha,” I remark, “That kind of ‘fine,’” and we both laugh. Suddenly he is some sort of fine, fine enough for now, at any rate.

Or a woman says: “Now I must go back into the hospital to tell a baby’s parents that it’s time to let him go. There isn’t any training for that.” We sit at that place of mourning for a moment, whilst she gathers some reserve of courage and compassion.

For some years, I used to see Vivien, who was slowly dying of cancer. She came because she wanted to write music, and stayed until the day when she said, “I’m happy to be here to see another Spring.” Foolishly, I failed to grasp that this was both forewarning and farewell. A week or two later she died. Into music Vivien poured many feelings of protest and of peace, feelings she would not put into words, or which were too finely wrought for words to be their medium.⁶

The space of being with students of all ages, and with parents, is one into which Focusing seeps naturally.

As I am listening to a person, I am asking: “What is one thing to say here, on which we can hang everything else?” I learned this question from my own teacher, Sulamita Aronovsky. I spend my days feeling down into it. It doesn’t matter whether we are playing the piano or Focusing. The question is the same.

I guess it might be like cutting diamonds or something: quite a small tap in just the right place; and suddenly, here is a mass of shimmering reflections.

A final thought about the person you love. That same great man of the theatre, who created the ballet on Rückert songs, wrote at the end of his life:

*There have really been only two people of importance in my later life _____,
for teaching me how to love, and _____, for being there to love.*

I take seven things from this: that the thing you love can never substitute for the person you love; that loving is a form and a source of agency, not essentially a feeling; that loving is something we learn; that learning to love another human being is the most beautiful of the things which we may learn, in the course of doing the thing we love; that love is hungry for the loved one; that love for the loved one is lived by a kind of commitment to the things which are beloved of your loved one; and that this loving commitment, which must of course be open-hearted, may even have the fierceness of the tiger.

Your love for yourself

Spinoza says that the ability to love yourself is the highest achievement in a human life.⁷

It's no good, when you beat yourself over the head with the thing you love; squeezing bitter juices from the sweetest fruit. Be self-friendly, self-tolerant, self-understanding. Let a certain natural energy of loving draw you along; and be wary of fatigue or tension or frustration, which may open the gulfs of misery.

You need a lot of forgiveness for yourself when (as Schnabel says) you are dealing with "music which is better than it can be played". Into that gap creep goblins of malice. Unless you are easy with yourself, they will destroy you.

Jump out of the flood. Shake off the water from your fur. Once your energies are free, you can give it your best shot. First you have to free up your power of intention. You must commit yourself. And then you have to be carefree, to find a certain insouciance. Let's go for it! Who cares, what may happen?

In sum: I have spoken of the Focusing I am doing myself, as a companion to love; of the contagion by which a parent is infected with Focusing; and of a faint impalpable transmission of a Focusing attitude, by which the person I'm Focusing with or playing the piano with or whatever is in some small measure renewed and enlivened.

5. I want to say a few words about "the real thing". Like, there are lots of musical or mathematical or theatrical or animal-loving people; but once in a while, one meets the real thing. My sense is: the real thing is truly different. I don't think it's a matter of degree.

For most people, the felt sense of a piece of music is in a body space. There is a distinct emotional tone, some kind of complex emotional shiver. I don't think it's like that at all for Mozart. When Mozart has a sense of the piece, he says it's "like a building". For sure. But where does he feel it? Not I think in the physical body, nor in any literal space whatsoever. It seems he feels it in a pure music "space", caught between time and eternity.

I watch Gavin turn away when I play, and am aware of funny synaesthetic movements of his body as he listens. It's not like the listening of an ordinary person. He enters a pure music space. Not a body-sensed space, if that means any kind of internal body sensation. It is a space made of and for sound, which hangs there almost palpably in the room.

Or I hear Richard talking about maths. Yes, he grasps a problem as a whole. One day, during a lecture on fluid mechanics at Cambridge University, he stood up and told the lecturer, "You are using a bad method." It would never occur to Richard that this was tactless. He is simply reaching into pure mathematical space and lifting out elegance.

Or I watch Nick acting. I suppose you might find the acting a shade primitive as yet, but that's not the point. There's a way in which he falls effortlessly into performance, and holds you there, which is not like you or me trying to act. There is a natural upsurge. It would seem seriously otiose to me, if I were say to Nick, "Can you feel your sense of this role in your body?"

But I might say, "Who is this person you're talking to? How come she feels like this?" Or, "I can't tell from your acting where she is. I can't tell how she's taking what you say." Then he will reach into a pure acting space, and something will happen.

For sure, the pure acting space is embodied. Where else could it be? (This is what I call “the rhetorical body”.) But that body is not exactly felt. It’s just there. Somewhere and nowhere. The “body” of Nick’s acting is not precisely “the felt body” of Focusing in psychotherapy. And please: we don’t want to get into an Alice in Wonderland world where people have feelings which they don’t feel.

Does Nick or Richard or Gavin have a felt sense? Well in one sense, yes of course; but not in another. If you think you can get these guys to rummage around in their body sensations, you’ve got another think coming. Still, when you meet them right where they are, you will find yourself asking, “If *this* isn’t Focusing, then what is?”

6. Now I must go and play Bach. Why? Just because. The great cycle of the *Preludes and Fugues* sits and looks like a Pekinese on a cushion; and I hear it calling like a nightingale, as the warm spring dawn is breaking.

Have no illusions. It’s not easy, doing the thing you love. It turns you inside out and re-makes you like a new birth. Still, as Gusztáv Fenyő said to me one day,

*When we play this music,
you become a better person.*

And maybe that is even so.

A COMMENTARY ON “DOING THE THING YOU LOVE”

When Bala Jaison and Paula Nowick read what I had written, they passed some questions to and fro. Unwilling to disturb the fabric of what I wrote at first, I shall essay some answers here.

1.) BALA and PAULA: *Could you name somehow the contrast between what you did in your beginning days and what you’re doing now, giving the reader some sense of your evolution?*

ROB: Kenneth is ten. We had a blazing row a few days ago. Still, he’s a friend, and it seems I’m forgiven. He just sent his best friend over, and he said: “Clare, go and see Rob. He’s a really good teacher. He doesn’t tell you what to do. He shows you something, and lets you do it your own way.” That’s pretty big of Kenneth, all things considered. And pretty shrewd, I should say. Perhaps I used to think the teacher knows stuff and passes it on to the person. Now I mostly think on my feet: “What’s this guy at? Is there something I can say here? And how do I get out of the way?”

You know how it is. After the first sixty thousand sessions, I found I had become very free. More and more, I’m just myself — intense or insouciant, serious or playful, chatty or reserved, kind or irreverent; in a way quite wayward on the surface, though continually touching and tapping the space of you-and-me, continually feeling forward.

Teaching Focusing, like teaching piano-playing, goes well, when I'm mostly concerned to learn something from the person. Anyway, I'm ill at ease with the missionary position.

2.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that Focusing doesn't have to be a structured thing?*

ROB: I like to draw a line between Focusing "direct-style" and Focusing "story-style". Direct-style is one way to use a dedicated Focusing session. It may follow steps, or be a natural Focusing process. In direct-style there is a vivid awareness of the body, of patterns of energy and sensation. Yet we began Focusing (did we not?) in story-style: with people in counselling sessions, pausing in the thick of conversation.

Whenever I'm with another person, I find that I must continually be turning inwards. Over and over, I vigorously discard some deadening formula or ritual. And since Focusing is contagious, as I never tire of saying, people catch from me this rhythm of making an inward turn. "We make the turn to Focusing," says Gene Gendlin, "when the forward movement is blocked." And so we do.⁸

FOCUSING AND LISTENING — a conversation

What are Focusing and Listening? And how do these two relate? I am happy to let the whole thing rest on four pillars. In what follows, as in real life, a Focuser says, "*I need...*", and a Listener answers, "*I offer...*"

1. Relational depth

FOCUSER: *Above all, you and I must feel we are in touch with one another. Garry Prouty is spot on, when he puts human contact in the first place. My friend Ann once said to me: "Now I have it. You mean, you are the miner's canary of contact." Yes. Exactly so. For the canary, it is a matter of life and death.*

LISTENER: Sometimes I may say something to renew our contact, to let you know I'm here — and who I am in myself, my feelings, and my being with you.

2. Experiential search

I am the expert on my life, both on what to say and how to move forwards. It is my life. I know how to find my way.

I'm listening to you. I try to take in every wrinkle of what you are saying, to follow each turn you make. I'm unhappy until each of us is sure that I've caught the sense and flavour of your meaning; that I am learning (enough) what this is like for you.

Then a magical silence may fall, into which the next piece comes.

3. The new space

Here is the bit which is unique to Focusing.

Sometimes all the feelings which come inside the situation die down, as waves breaking on the shore die down over several days, following a storm out at sea. Now comes the peace of a new day and calm at the water's edge. Without ruffling up a fresh storm, I let some mild new sense come to me of the-storm-as-a-whole.

*Some way puzzled,
I sense the whole of that.*

*Now I am not that,
nor does it burden me.*

*Gray skies are parted,
and the air is clear.*

This is the crucial shift, which tends to happen all by itself. The shift is from being IN the space of the situation, to the situation being IN the new space, the space of Focusing. Of the mild new sense which forms there, Mozart says, "It is like an apple in the palm of my hand."

Amongst the freedoms I allow myself is this — to say something intended to lead to an opening up of the new space — or which says "Hello there" to the apple which is lying in your hand.

*Apples fall when they are ripe.
An apple fell into your hand.
I see it cradled there.*

4. The open space

I'm just some guy sitting there, right? Just an ordinary person, a bit of a fool.

People say I seem very relaxed, very easy, not at all rule-driven. I don't know about that! Fully 95% of the time I am listening, wrinkle-by-wrinkle. I need all of myself, just to listen; just to stay plain and simple. Yet in a sense this is wonderfully easy, wonderfully peaceful. I am leaning into the flow of listening, letting myself trust you to find your own way. It is your life.

What of the other 5%?

It is so hard to stay fresh, to break free of every formula!

*Apples fall when they are ripe.
An apple falls into my hand,
and my hand is open to gather it.*

In the open space of listening, I may say anything at all which seems likely to be helpful, or just because I feel like it. Our encounter must be safe. So long as I am truly listening, it is typically very safe and very gentle. It must also be alive!

I am always safe, when you respond to me with the whole of your being, when you listen with your heart. And I need you to be alive! I do know when you're off-key! Sometimes I wince or protest. Or perhaps you hear something sour?

Then I go back to listening.

3.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that in your evolution of Focusing you've come to a point where it's just woven: Listening is woven in — 'being with' is woven in?*

ROB: I like this very much. The image of a weaving-in. I always wanted Listening (and Focusing too!) to be woven into the fabric of my life. That is important to me. I might say, "That is my faith."

Joyce and I were in a shoe shop in Galashiels yesterday, where the woman serving was a little sour. I wondered, "Where can I 'go in' here? How shall I make contact?" I said, "You must get pretty fussy about shoes, working in here?" — "Fussy. Yes. Yes, I do. Fussy. Very very fussy." She smiled. Suddenly I could feel her feeling — "Somebody knows I'm here."

It may be that the word "fussy" fitted more than her relationship with shoes. When a person seizes your word with so much welcome, you may judge you said something right. Many times, I heard Gene Gendlin say, "See! I said something right. I'll say it again!"

Naturally, the new space may open up wherever two or three are gathered together. In a shop, a bedroom or a dental surgery. Why would it not? Frequently, if I say, "What are you into?", it is there in a flash. Still, it is likely a Focusing process will go deeper when other things are set aside; and when the Listener has knowledge and experience of being a companion to Focusing.

For twenty years I struggled to forge an alchemical fusion between my own deep knowing, and what Gene Gendlin actually was with me in person; what he did or showed or passed on, or heard or felt or saw or was open to in me (even it seems I was there "to teach him a new world"), in a fairly small number of life-changing sessions in the years 1988-1991. I am profoundly thankful to have had immediate access to Gene's unmistakable genius as a listener, and his direct personal transmission of the person-centred lineage of Carl Rogers. It is shockingly easy to miss Carl's essential insight, and fall unknowingly to the side. Here is Gene Gendlin on Carl Rogers:

Rogers discovered that a self-propelled process arises from inside... When each thing is received utterly as intended, it makes new space inside. Then the steps go deeper and deeper... Blacks, women, gay people and others felt helped... because these therapists knew that every client had to teach them a new world... To learn this... requires some years of practice... but academic education does not help... I am glad that Carl heard me say these good things. [my emphasis]

I call the self-propelled process “experiential search”. It seems most odd that we have had no name for this before. Having the name, I can frame a question: how is experiential search woven in to the fabric of my life? Well, for many years, I have kept myself busy with four kinds of person-centred, Focusing-oriented practice:

1. carrying forward the grassroots tradition of *peer-counselling* from which we came;
2. teaching the *essential principles* of our practice to musicians, artists, writers, actors and counsellors, and to young people heading for these and other trades;
3. the project of *weaving in*, which is about being vividly open to life in all its small interstices and intersections; and
4. finding new forms — of *spiritual accompaniment*, and of *life-coaching* — which are about learning, from each new person, a new world.

My work, like my life, is about seeing things as we see them and adding nothing (“flying as the hawk flies”) and is driven by a passionate love for justice.

And here for the sake of sincerity I record one searing failure: that I so seldom found any way to come alongside my father, Bob, to weave our lives together into relational depth. It is a great sadness. And now he is gone.

Yet always for me, weaving-in has been the heart of it all, a deep, central practice, something which makes it possible for life in the world to become a spiritual existence of poignancy and depth, with a power to transform us and to free us to act. I hope I may have given you, my reader, some flavour of that weaving-in, of the possible ubiquity of experiential search. Is it not this, rather than piano-playing itself, which is the thing I love to do, that draws the waters of my life naturally into one flow, and saves me from digging up the dead?

4.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that piano and creativity are a form of Focusing? — that is, without the normal structure?*

ROB: I am sure, whenever a person is doing the thing they love, that a kind of Focusing must arise naturally. You have a relationship with the bowl you are carving. You see the image latent in the stone, as Michelangelo says.

I just had a jacket made. Very extravagant. Very gorgeous. I went to thank the maker. I could feel the love in her craftswomanship. As I was saying “thank you” I was aware that she was touching, in a quick, shy way, as a blue-collar worker sometimes will, a lovely sense of meaning, of everything which it adds to her life to be making something of beauty, which will do its job well and bring lasting joy to another.

Writing too calls forth a form of Focusing. The main part of this writing is an instance, both of doing the thing you love, and of a Focusing process. Borrowing a phrase from Gene Gendlin, I might call it “an instance of itself”. I wrote without notes in a single Focusing writing session of about ten hours, letting the text grow organically under me.

I felt like the Wedding-Guest in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge's great ballad about the wild authority of the call to prophecy or poetry: about the sheer loneliness of the creative moment — "*Oh Wedding-Guest, my soul hath been / Alone on a wide, wide sea*" — the sea of clear vision or bad conscience, of unconscious imagery breaking over the little ship of daily sanity.

The Rime is haunted by slavery and empire, by guilt and complicity, shame and remorse. Though I have written here only from a personal point of view, I should be sorry if you thought me unaware that the higher forms of active love are for things like truth, justice and mercy; for simplicity, being and self-knowledge; for friendship, compassion and non-violence. Especially we must love that sense of truth which leads directly to a love for justice, justice to the oppressed and solidarity with the beleaguered. These higher loves and loyalties are as urgent now as in 1795 when Coleridge was crying out against the slavers of Bristol.

Near the end of his life, Socrates asked whether what is right is right merely because the gods love it. Or do the gods love it because it is right? For us, the issue is whether an action is right, simply because WE love it. I am certain (as certain even as Plato) that the answer is "No".⁹ As we sit here watching the suicide of humanity, you may well ask whether what I have written has anything to offer in the face of tragedy.

All I can say is, I have tried to write the little piece I know. I know that there is no wealth but life. I know that love is the core of life. And I know that good things happen, when you are doing the thing you love.¹⁰

... She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

– Virginia Woolf, in closing *To the Lighthouse*¹¹

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1a. 8th June 2008. Today I had a letter from my dear friend Bala Jaison. She wrote: "*Life is so complicated. I have worked so hard to train myself not to react to anything, until I have all the facts. Not always easy to do, but I try.*" As I sat with these words, this writing began to roam about my mind, in a series of stirrings. It is a response to Bala, though in no obvious sense, and I should like to dedicate it to her.
- 1b. I thank Bebe Simon, Kathy McGuire-Bouwman and Suzanne Noel for precious solidarity, not least in the process of writing. Suzanne is uneasy about the word "thing". Of course. Still, if I took it out I'd have to start over.
- 1c. My thoughts owe much to the marvellous reflections of Harry Frankfurt (in *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton, 2004).

2. W B Yeats: He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.
Sappho: Poem 16 in David Campbell's text (Loeb series: *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. I would like to thank, but not to name, the woman who wanted not to be "hippy-dippy". I admire her flair for words, her ear for a turn of phrase.
4. For Anna Paskevaska, see www.paskevaska.com/cv.html.
5. *Liebst du um Schönheit* (1902) is the fifth of Gustav Mahler's *Fünf Lieder nach Rückert* (*Five Rückert Songs*).
6. "... too finely wrought for words to be their medium". In a famous story, Mendelssohn says, "The reason why we cannot say what music means is not at all that music is vague. The meaning of music is in fact far more precise than the meaning of words, and that is why we cannot put it into words."
7. *Ethics Prop. 4.52, scholium*. In Spinoza: *Complete Works*. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 2002. Cited in Harry Frankfurt, op cit.
- 8a. In the following passage, I owe the invaluable phrase "relational depth" to Dave Mearns, and the image of "the miner's canary" to Ann Weiser Cornell.
- 8b. The integrated model of Focusing and Listening which follows is my own (see also www.robfoxcroft.com and www.robfoxcroft.com/blog). It is closely consonant with my experience of Gene Gendlin, and his writings, e g:
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1988) Carl Rogers (1902-1987). In *American Psychologist*, (43) 2. 127-128), from which I have quoted in this article.
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1990). The small steps of the therapy process: How they come and how to help them come. In G. Lietaer, J. Rombauts and R. Van Balen (Eds.), *Client-centered and experiential psychotherapy in the nineties*, pp. 205-224. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1997). *A process model*. New York: The Focusing Institute, esp. pages 220-225 and 241-245.
9. Plato, *Euthyphro* [12A] (freely translated).
10. "There is no wealth but life": Ruskin, John (1860). *Unto This Last*. Reprinted in *Unto this last and other writings*. Penguin Classics (1987).
11. Virginia Woolf — see <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100101.txt>



FOCUSING AND CHRONIC PAIN

Elena Frezza

“Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.”

— Eugene T. Gendlin

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to share my personal experience with how Focusing can lead to dramatic change in how we relate to pain or any chronic symptom. Focusing is a powerful process for being in contact with our body in a gentle and specific way. It shows us how to listen to the wisdom held within pain and chronic symptoms so they may guide us into healing. By making space inside to *be with* pain and listen to all its facets, accepting them as they are, Focusing shows us how to experientially discover pain’s implicit felt meaning. Through examples of Focusing on chronic pain, we see how *being with* our pain opens up its deeper meaning, helping us to move forward in our lives in a way that was not possible before. As Eugene Gendlin writes, “Our body knows the direction of healing and life. If you take the time to listen to it through Focusing, it will give you the steps in the right direction” (Gendlin 1978).

FOCUSING AND CHRONIC PAIN

One night, as I was going up the stairs of my pretty, luxurious house in New Jersey, I decided not to speak anymore. “What’s the point?” I thought. “What for?” Speaking had no purpose. Talking changed nothing. Everything was the same. I did not feel heard. Something in me had become sad, dimmed, and was furious at each failed attempt to change things. I reached my bedroom feeling that something had broken inside me. I lay down on my same old bed, feeling that same old angst... the loneliness, the inner solitude, which I had also known all my life. Something had changed, however. I was not going to speak about these things anymore, nor about my soul, my dreams, my desires, or about how I wanted love to manifest between us, in our family — so many things about which I would no longer speak.

I woke up to the sound of the alarm clock. Upon getting up from the bed and placing my foot on the floor, tearing pain shot up my leg and nailed itself to my gluteus like a sharp, fine-pointed knife from a merciless executioner. This was the beginning of a voyage my body would undertake in search for the Lost Self of Elena — misplaced somewhere in some shortcut or detour, in the journey of her life.

In one unexpected instant EVERYTHING had changed forever. The flow of my life had stopped. I was no longer myself. I became MY PAIN, for myself and for others. Greetings were no longer “Hi Elena. How are you?” but “Hello. How is that pain in your back?”

The woman who was always available, with so much energy for life, who took the kids to school with joy, who was agile and active, who sang and danced to Broadway musicals, the model from Fifth Avenue, the one full of plans — she was now just a longed-for dream.

This tormenting pain led to a seemingly never-ending series of doctor's examinations, medical treatments, and all kinds of body-based therapies such as Yoga, meditation, the Alexander Technique, etc. All of these futile attempts to ease my pain only made me feel worse, for I felt even more guilty, inept, and impotent due to the fact that nothing stopped the pain. Not even surgery helped. I was left feeling that death was the only thing that could free me from my torment, and my family from having to tolerate my suffering.

The fact is that I did not know how to listen to the pain, listen to its heartbeat, its yearnings, its story — its wisdom, and language.

Today, 24 years have passed since that first day of pain. My grandchildren are the age my children were at that time, five and two years old. I can play with them, run, sing, dance, look for them in the kindergarten — and make them fly!

What caused this dramatic change was Focusing, a naturally occurring process discovered by Eugene Gendlin (Gendlin, 1978). Focusing is a powerful process for making contact with our body as a source of information, and listening to the answers it provides. By learning Focusing I could listen to my pain, listen to its story, its wisdom. The pain itself became my teacher and guide into healing. Listening, in a Focusing way, to 'all that' which the pain wished to reveal showed me the road back 'home' to the woman I had been. Focusing saved my life.

One of the functions of pain is to give warning that something is not right in the body: warning that maybe some damage has occurred; warning of sickness or of a wound. Pain offers us the possibility of gaining information, and serves as useful data for corresponding diagnosis and treatment. Yet, tragically, most of us do not know how to listen to our pain when it starts to whisper to us so that its warning may be heard.

In my experience pain also begins the moment in which some part of our essence is being strangled — in the unequivocal instant when our *whole self* is broken, and something inside us needs to die in order for us to remain alive. Often, when this happens, there is no love, no acceptance, no unconditional support, or listening to the pain, no listening to the screams and suffering of the soul — no faith in the healing process — so the pain remains alone and unheard, its scream becoming louder, as the strangling of our essence continues.

Focusing helps us understand and accompany the complexity and lack of clarity that comes with pain and chronic symptoms. We discover the particular meaning of each pain as it experientially reveals to us its implicit meaning. "Your body knows the direction of healing and life. If you take the time to listen to it through Focusing, it will give you the steps in the right direction." (Gendlin, 1978, p.76)

Focusing teaches us *how* to remain on that edge, that physically sensed edge of the experience, so that we may access the intricate complexity within each symptom/pain.

Gendlin names that which comes from staying with the whole of a problem, issue, situation, or, in this case, pain or a physical symptom, the '*felt sense*'. A '*felt sense*' is the

“holistic, unclear sense of the whole thing” (p.55). By waiting for the quality of that *felt sense* to come into focus, waiting for its ‘crux’, and by symbolizing this vague, unclear feeling with a word, phrase, image, or gesture, the body experiences a *shift* in how it is holding it all. One gets a sense of ‘*this is right*’ about ‘*all that*’. Eugene Gendlin writes: “...of its own accord, the feeling changes” (p.57).

Focusing teaches us how to find or invite a *felt sense* to form about pain. This body sensation has meaning and holds a knowing that has not yet been expressed in words. It is sometimes fuzzy, yet concretely and physically felt. By being with it, something opens up inside. The pain is able to speak to us, and our essence can find its flow again — its wholeness.

For therapists, counselors, and healing practitioners, Focusing offers the possibility of developing a type of listening that uses each individual person as its guide, and the pain or symptom they suffer, thereby adding an essential element to traditional pain treatment concepts. Focusing teaches us how to ‘keep company’ with this inner felt sense and find its subjective, personal, felt meaning, by honoring each individual’s experience — and *experiencing*.

By learning to listen to our pain’s inner wisdom, we are able to choose from within the methods or therapeutic strategies that best meet our particular needs, based on our specific experience.

Focusing thus frees us from predetermined concepts, diagnoses that box us in, and psychological beliefs which categorize and label — all of which usually leave us full of guilt, internal pressures that invalidate us, and expectations that something or someone outside of us knows more about the pain and the symptom than we ourselves know. It allows us to make a space inside to be with and listen to all the many facets of the pain, like that part of us that carries the guilt, or feels invalidated and hopeless, or the part of us that feels like a victim or victimizer.

As Ann Weiser Cornell writes in her book, *The Radical Acceptance of Everything* (2005), accepting all these parts as they are brings a new possibility of trust, a feeling of greater wholeness to the Focusing process. Cornell writes, “We are holders of the open space that includes whatever wants to come (...) We know that there are no enemies in the inner world. We enable the focuser to form a positive relationship with what comes, a relationship of listening and acceptance or, if that isn’t possible, a relationship with the part that finds it hard to accept what’s there” (p. 37).

What follows is a brief summary of a Focusing process in which I was able to hold an accepting relationship with the chronic pain in my sciatic nerve.

Elena: I am in my waist. I’m sensing something tight there... I would like to stay with it for a while to see if it releases a bit, at least long enough to let it know that I know it is there.

Listener: You are sensing there is something tight in your waist.

E: Yes.

L: And you need to stay there.

E: Yes. It was good to hear that back... that something which is tight felt heard, recognized.

The use of the term “something” helps the person dis-identify from the symptom and also invites all that is implicit to express itself.

L: Would it be OK to stay with it, giving it all the space it needs?

E: It is like... mmm.... something tight... no, this is not exactly the right word. It is something being crushed.

L: It is more like something being crushed.

E: Mmm... no, it's not that either... it feels pulled, like squeezed... pulled, as if something is binding it to my waist, it passes through the right gluteus, by the sciatica to my thigh. (With her hands, Elena demonstrates the pulling and crushing.)

L: It passed through the gluteus, through the sciatica... it is like squeezed, but also pulled.

E: Like when you thread something and then pull the thread, the way it bunches up.

L: Ahhh, I understand you now: like when you pull the thread of a stitching, and the cloth bunches up.

Notice how, by staying with the felt sense, and looking for the “handle”, the description becomes more accurate. The meaning begins to be symbolized with images, gestures, sometimes sounds (e.g., “Grrrrrr”).

E: There is tension, but it's different. Everything is changing.

L: Maybe see if you can stay there with “all that” which is changing.

E: Yes, there was tension, but what is screaming now is in the thigh, in the sciatic nerve; it feels very “stabbing”.

L: There is something stabbing there.

E: It is as if it were the needle, as if the needle of the stitched hem remained there. Of course! It's as if someone had forgotten the needle of the hem in my thigh!!

L: As if someone forgot the needle in your thigh.

E: It's amusing, as if the needle is looking at me and is asking me, “Why am I here? What am I doing here? I want to get out of here.” The little threading hole of the needle looks like a little face.

L: The threading hole looks like a little face.

E: She's there: upright, rigid, like a needle, and she can't move.

L: So that's how she feels, upright, rigid. She can't move.

E: Because if she moves, it pinches. Hurts.

L: Ahhh...

E: Can you say that back to me again? "If she moves..."

L: If she moves, it pinches and hurts.

When this part feels heard and legitimized, it begins to symbolize itself as a needle. It acquires its own life, begins to express its vital energy, and to tell us about its existence, its particular quality as a needle, which we can only access through it, by relating to it as it is.

E: I sense there is something very important here...

L: You are sensing something very important there. Maybe it has something to say to you.

E: She feels desperate... this is not her place to be.

L: Maybe notice how the needle feels about not being able to leave this place.

E: Oh!!! It is asking for help!

L: It is asking for help.

E: Its little head is asking me, "What do I do to get out of here?"

L: "What do I do to get out of here?" This is what its little head is asking you. May be you can check to see what the needle needs.

E: What it needs is to disappear... It is as if...

L: It needs to disappear...

E: Yes, as if by magic, because it should not move; otherwise, it hurts.

L: It needs to disappear by magic so that it doesn't hurt if it moves.

In this "staying with" step we are facilitating the available implicit material to express itself, which brings forth more information. In addition, please notice the importance of empathizing with the needle, which is desperate, as if asking for help. It can't move because it will hurt. It has to disappear.

In this example, we are approaching a crucial point in Focusing — a point that leads the Focuser toward a specific body certainty or inwardly sensed knowing: there is something there that is very important. It has to do with the life-energy, and at the same time is not yet clear. It is definitely experienced by the fact that there is some felt sense of core importance

here. The needle knows, and by keeping company with both the sense (of the needle) and the resonance of the listener, the Focuser's experience is carried forward... to next steps.

- E:** *(Pause)* I'm sensing that the needle is withdrawing... as if it's shrinking in on itself within me...
- L:** Notice if it is OK just to be with this.
- E:** Something about this is very strong. As if I am touching something, but I don't know what that something is...
- L:** You might take some time to sense in your body that something you are touching, not knowing what it is.
- E:** *(Long silence.)* Something is vibrating in my chest...but it is not clear yet.
- L:** Can you say hello to that something that is not yet clear vibrating in your chest?
- E:** *(Silence.)* It's a part of me that I know... a forgotten part... **this** is the shrunken part!!!

(Elena cries for a while)

- L:** *(Keeps quiet company.)*
- E:** *(Still in tears)* I can feel its longing, its wanting to belong out here, to be more present in my life.
- L:** Would it be all right to be with this part of you for a while, this part that is longing to be more present in your life?

At this point in the process, some meaning is revealed: this forgotten part is saying "Here I am". In this example, we can see the importance of keeping company with that which is not clear, that which cannot yet be explicated into words. This is the experience of being at the edge of something that is emerging, which is crucial to the process of Focusing. By being with what is there, what needed to be said through a pain symptom is revealed.

- E:** *(Long Pause)* Wow!!! I can slowly feel its energy...its alive jumping quality... it brings joy... excitement.
- L:** Can you welcome all that is coming?
- E:** Something is opening up. My chest now feels more spacious, more alive, as if something were dancing inside me. I feel happy, as if my body has a smile of thanks inside. The needle is no longer there. There is no more pain. Nothing pinches. I sense a path opening up, a very vital new path.
- L:** There is a path opening up... a very vital new path...
- E:** I would like to stay in this place a bit longer and slowly say goodbye to this experience.

L: Maybe take a moment here to thank your body for all that it has brought forth today... and perhaps to take some time to say goodbye to this inner experience, before returning here and opening your eyes.

Ending the session by receiving what has come is an essential step. It is important to notice the 'felt shift', the change inside, notice this place internally, in order to return to it later; and thank our body, which is always present and available as a source of information, transformation, direction, and unfolding.

As we have seen through this example of Focusing on Chronic Pain, *being with* our pain opens up its deeper meaning, thereby helping us to begin moving forward in our lives ... in a way that was not possible before.

As listeners, we learn from Focusing that it is important to be centered in the experience of each person — and with a deep respect for the organic wisdom that comes from within so that our interventions, suggestions, our *keeping company*, and our felt reflections, can all resonate with that unique experience in its specificity, from a space of empathy.

It is common to dismiss and discount pain with comments such as:

- “This is not chronic fatigue. It is pure narcissism.”
- “This pain must be bringing you some secondary benefit.”
- “Look what you are doing to yourself! This is a hysterical manifestation.”
- “Come on, now, you must make the decision to stop being the victim.”

Though these statements may reflect certain ‘theories’, none of these interventions help in any way; on the contrary, they label the symptoms, stop the healing process, and are of such radical and destructive violence that they plunge the individual into an irreversible process of hopelessness and guilt.

People who suffer from chronic pain are often accused by others of exaggerating or “making up” the pain, especially when the medical tests show no evidence for its cause, or indications of why the symptom should repeat itself. Sufferers often express feelings such as, “I feel so alone and lonely! No one believes me!”

This difficulty in finding the original cause is a painful experience. In addition to suffering for long periods of time, and undergoing many treatments without positive results, the client often experiences the suggestion that the symptoms may be psychological in origin. The implication is that the sufferer is not even a “normal” person. I have often heard comments similar to this one: “I would prefer to have cancer so that people would believe me; or a serious accident, or something that can be seen”.

In my personal experience with “keeping company” with individuals that suffer this “punishment”, “torture”, “flagellation”, or “cross” of not finding the physical cause for their pain, I have noticed that it is easier for some people to undergo all sorts of treatments than to “pay attention inside”. These many treatments may include acupuncture, medication, corrective exercises, using belts or orthopedic neck braces, and even changing one’s mattress! Yes,

many even prefer to undergo surgical interventions, rather than listen to the body, keeping it company, staying there with it, feeling oneself as “the body”, and asking lovingly, “*What needs to be heard?* You, my dear body, who has to carry all the weight of my pain and has to support everything that is so difficult for me, what do you wish to say to me?”

My first step in understanding my own back pain was reading a book by John Sarno, MD, titled “Mind Over Back Pain” (Sarno, 1964). Dr. Sarno’s book was extremely helpful and relevant to understanding my physical symptoms, and this knowing was a doorway to Focusing for me.

Sarno views symptoms of pain as distractions from threatening and terrifying emotions. In other words, pain prevents these emotions from being expressed. He considers pain to be a strategy designed to maintain our attention centered on the symptom or physical pain, thus preventing us from contacting dangerous feelings, for fear they will escape and become conscious in an intolerable manner.

Sarno’s theory connects directly with the internal rage generated primarily during childhood, with the anger or pressure that arises from having to meet internal parental demands in addition to the demands of our daily lives. According to Sarno, some important and powerful questions that invite us to think psychologically, not physically, when the symptoms or pain are present include: “What is happening in my life today?”

The following expresses one person’s fear of paying attention inside:

“I know myself from the eyes of others, and I hate myself,” Fabiana says, while crying, sitting on an orthopedic chair after her second spinal surgery, immersed in deep pain and horrifying fear. She seems even more terrified of feeling internally what is really happening inside. “I know there is something in me. I know it is there and that I should feel it, but it terrifies me. I cannot suffer any more. I prefer this pain.”

She remembers when her father, who often spoke to her through images, told her she was like an immaculate white dress, of the most precious and beautiful cloth and lace, but that it had a red stain on it. “And all my life, my father focused on the red stain.”

After the Focusing session, Fabiana opened her tear-filled eyes, and said: “I want to know myself, from my own eyes, and believe myself; I want to discover how I am and learn to love myself as I am. I am not a white dress with a stain; the stain and the dress belong to my father, they are not mine. I want to find Fabiana, looking at myself from inside like we did today, with my own gaze, and find myself.”

This testimony allows us to see the degree of fear, the terror, the “more-than-horrifying” fear that one person was experiencing, and which prevented her from exploring herself internally. A part of her knows there is *something there* and assumes that finding it will be so intolerable that she will be driven to madness and disintegration. The sense of

fragility and defenselessness is so overwhelming that it becomes a question of bare survival for the person to not go inside. To her, the suggestion to keep this pain company by going inside her body deeply seems to be an invitation to hurt even more. This is a very difficult belief to transcend until the possibility of working with Focusing comes along.

I invited Fabiana to close her eyes, feel her breathing, and slowly bring her awareness into her body, taking time to notice the feelings that were starting to form. I suggested that she simply *hold the space* and find the words to describe the tense or painful places. I repeated her words back to her, so she could feel that I was close to what she was experiencing, inviting her to just ‘say hello’ to the feelings, without any intention of changing them. Focusing is unique in that it teaches us specific ways to *sit beside* our issues, rather than *identifying* with them. Working in this gentle, and empathic way allowed Fabiana to develop trust, in both the process and herself. She felt that she had an inner permission to ‘sit with’ her pain.

With the safe and caring attitude of Focusing, Fabiana was able, to fully experience the part that *knew*, “There is *something* in me... there’s *more* here...” — and — by maintaining a space of safety and non-judgment, she was also able to be with the part of her that was terrified to feel that ‘something’.

Focusing showed me *how* to access and listen deeply to what was inside, to find my inner space, the *felt sense* of it all.

The testimony of Inés Berezra, a client with chronic pain, shows us how Focusing and the knowledge of Dr. Sarno’s work changed her relationship with her pain and helped welcome her healing.

It was not the first time I felt pain in my back. In fact, I had learned to live with that pain for the last 12 years (I am now 55 years old).

This summer, however, the pain was more intense. I tried to not hear it, as I had done for so many years. I had gotten used to living with it. This year, though, I carried a lot of things inside me, and had lots of internal and external pressures. I was also busy with all the arrangements and preparations for my daughter Laura’s wedding.

Returning from vacation and already with a discomfort in my back, I tried to keep up with my daily rhythm. A new, sharp, intolerable pain, however, forced me to go to a medical center just to make sure everything was all right. They gave me a shot of a strong relaxant, and I thought I could continue as before with all my daily insanity.

A few days after I entered the hospital, the doctors said that the only solution was to operate. I had a herniated disc, pinching the vertebra. My husband, “Buby”, called my therapist, Elena Frezza. The first return call I received while still interned helped me to know that she was concerned about me. This alone helped me feel a bit better. She suggested I read Dr. Sarno’s book while still in the hospital.

I was interned for ten days. I returned home on a Friday and that night I received another call from Elena, who guided me on the phone into Focusing so that I could connect with the pain, letting it know I was listening to it, listening to the anger in me, and letting it know that I knew it was there. While we spoke, the pain lessened, and bit-by-bit, I reduced my medication. We continued to work with “IT” in her office until the pain disappeared completely. By feeling loved, feeling that someone was taking care of me, I could be with the pain and listen to it, and listen to myself.

My daughter’s wedding finally arrived and I am able to say that I enjoyed it. I danced without fear and suffered no consequences. When pain comes in any way, I tell myself — recalling Dr. Sarno — “I know it is psychological and not physical”. While working with Focusing, I could return to my daily activities, but now listening to the messages my body was giving me before they started screaming.

We need to — and should — pay a lot of attention to that sensation that comes warning us and asking us to offer ourselves a little care and love.

— Inés Benezra de Bocles

CONCLUSION

I have learned to thank my body for each emotion or feeling, no matter how heart breaking, threatening, or painful it may be, because I know that by listening to those screams from the soul, listening to my inner being’s need to express itself, and its need to have *more of me* be the protagonist in my life, my body quiets down.

I have learned to allow other parts of myself to enter the scene, even those that are not loved or accepted by others, or perhaps by me, so that I can keep them company in a Focusing way. I have learned to accept that it is not possible for everyone to love me, that pleasing others in order to be loved is to forget about myself, abandoning myself and leaving parts of myself in the mists of my inner caverns.

I have also learned to accept and embrace my humanity, so when my body denounces something in me that I have not been able to hear in other ways (such as, “it hurts”), I know I need to pause and listen to it, always with Focusing as my loving companion.

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ON CULTIVATING A GRACED LIFE The Struggle within a Culture that Disconnects

Marianne and Elizabeth Thompson

The year was 1979, Elizabeth was five months old, and I was attending my first Bio-Spiritual Focusing and Healing Listening workshop. It was a reunion with Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell whom I had met fifteen years earlier when they gave a course on Human Sexuality to a group of nuns. I first realized as a twenty-four year old nun in the class that I was searching for a human face to a spirituality that is as old as the body itself. Today when people ask why I entered and left the convent, I use physicist Stephen Hawkins phrase to explain what I have now come to know: I was “remembering the future.” Deep within me was a knowing full of possibilities for the future.

Writing now twenty-nine years later, I take a deep breath as my body clearly remembers my first Focusing experience. Ed gently instructed me to pay attention to what would come in the middle of my body when I sensed into the feel of having three small kids at home. The felt sense of being cooped up, constantly busy, and tied down came quickly. An image that came of me riding the crest of a wave at the beach near our home was accompanied by a deep sense of freedom, and so began the journey we write about here.

Before that first workshop ended, I knew deep in my bones I had found the reason I entered and left the convent. I was searching for a healthy spirituality that would not only support my growing development, but also that I could share with others. Through Ed and Pete my dream was realized of teaching our children to grow up with this newly discovered process of Focusing. Instead of experiencing the same stale feelings over and over again, my children would learn a way through stuck patterns of behavior. Unless we as children are fortunate to know a way of listening to ourselves, we all grow up experiencing what Gerald May writes about in *Simply Sane*.

He writes, “In all my experience as a psychiatrist and as a human being, the deepest, most pervasive pathology I have seen is the incredible harshness we have toward ourselves. I don’t know where it comes from originally, but I know it is at the core of so many of our troubles. We jerk ourselves around, berate ourselves, drive ourselves and confine ourselves in ways we would never subject an animal to. We are willing subjects of our own abuse. The most religious of us are so terrified of appearing selfish that we subject ourselves to un-nameable internal cruelties. And those of us who are more selfish stuff ourselves with poisons and whip ourselves into self-destructive highs. Some of us are meaner than others, but I have yet to meet a person in modern Western culture who was not in some way cruelly self-abusive” (May, 1993). In light of a culture that breeds self-criticism, I knew this process would be the most precious gift I could give my children, a gift that would serve them well throughout their lives.

I found myself moving toward a way of being that placed much more trust in my own experience and in a process of inner unfolding. As soon as I became familiar with this inner

terrain, I began to talk to the children about stories and how our feelings are like stories. They loved having us read bedtime stories to them, and if we couldn't finish the story, waiting for another evening carried with it the excitement that unfinished stories hold for all of us. With not much more of an introduction than that, the older two were soon eager to listen inside themselves to see what stories they could hear.

Elizabeth was quite young at the time, and I used to say she absorbed Focusing through osmosis, but as I write today remembering that I was still nursing her when I attended that first workshop, I can say she absorbed it through her mother's milk. My body had no trouble letting me know when something I heard from either Pete or Ed was right on target; my nursing breasts let me know immediately!

The following vignettes describe how Elizabeth's early experiences with Focusing laid the foundation for self-trust.

One night at bedtime when Elizabeth was seven, she seemed agitated and frightened. Earlier that day Elizabeth had been scared by the sight of a man walking on crutches with only one leg. As I sat on the edge of the bed with her, it wasn't very long before I could see her relax. She looked up at me with the words: "Mommy, where did the scary feeling go?" Feeling better was what first attracted her to focusing.

No matter how loving a home our children grow up in, parents, teachers, friends and relatives cannot always know the effect their words and behaviors are having on them. Children constantly face peer pressures and images telling them how they are supposed to look, dress, smell, talk and behave. Serious commitment and time is required to accompany children with the feelings that arise as these pressures penetrate and bombard their lives. I also knew that I needed to pay attention to my own feelings as I watched Elizabeth's emotional pain result at times in severe headaches and vomiting. I recall wanting to make her feel better, to step in and fix the problem, to tell her not to worry. Only by paying attention to my feelings in a Focusing way could I allow Elizabeth the time and space needed for her wisdom to unfold. I had to first live the process and let my own inner unfolding guide me, before the applications with my children could become apparent.

"Cheater, cheater, you're a cheater" were the words Elizabeth heard from her classmates in a junior high school history class. Ever since the 6th grade when she took an interest in school, she faced these kinds of comments from students who were convinced there was something wrong with "smart" kids. As we sat together listening to this hurting place, she felt alone and pushed up against a wall, cornered and trapped. With her head she knew she needed to cuddle and gently listen to this place, but she felt a strong resistance. The words came, "I don't want to be cuddled because then you will become freer with yourself and your classmates. You will do what you want to do, and I can't stand being ridiculed even more." These words felt right as she said, "I just can't stand the thought of having to face more jealous remarks." After many tears and more time, she asked that place, "What can I do to help you?" What eventually arose brought a "humongous breath" as she realized she could let the kids be themselves and accept them while at the same time saying, "I can be myself!"

A dream that night confirmed what she already knew. In the dream she was dressed as a cheerleader although she didn't go to the game. As people noticed she didn't attend, they

asked, “Why aren’t you going to the game?” and I replied, “Because I don’t want to.” Upon awakening she knew exactly what the dream meant: she realized she could accept the cheerleaders — those who made fun of her at school — while not having to act like them.

“How does it feel to want to please me and at the same time want to become more independent?” I asked Elizabeth when she was entering her adolescent years. She could feel some of the ties that attached her to me begin to loosen, and yet she still felt torn by wanting to please me. She marveled when the words “caught in a maze” and “trapped” emerged to describe exactly what she was feeling. A sense of peace swept over her as she realized that “childish ropes could dissolve and new and stronger bonds could emerge between us.”

What began as a hope and a hunch that our children would not have to get stuck in unprocessed behavioral patterns turned into more than I could ever have guessed at the time. As I look at Elizabeth’s writings, I see a gradual development of a graced attitude of *allowing* that permeates her Focusing experiences. This all too rare quality is difficult to grasp as most of us are tempted to remain in control of the outcome with our vested interests in place. When we are free enough to own what is real, for a long enough period of time so the outcome is allowed to organically emerge out of our experiences, we allow our gifted selves to reach out and touch others.

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As I (Elizabeth) reflect on the numerous ways Focusing has impacted my life, I pause with a particular question. Having developed a habit of listening to the felt-senses that accompanied my childhood, shouldn’t I now be living out of my felt-sense on a much more frequent, daily basis? Shouldn’t I be more like the Gene Gendlin on video who pauses, turns inward, and speaks slowly from a nebulous and developing place inside? I didn’t need much time to realize that my twenty-nine years of growing self-trust are the direct result of developing sensitivity to inner friction, to those times when felt senses are longing to be heard, or to those times when I disconnect from my authenticity, when experiences become flat and felt senses difficult to access. I don’t believe it is possible to be congruently aligned with felt senses at all moments in the day. In the same way that evolution moves forward through friction, through some challenging interaction with the environment, I find that my own development feeds on the dynamic between connection and disconnection.

My experience with Focusing at a very young age developed my sensitivity to that friction. As a child, the inner contrasts were obvious and overwhelming. I was either content or scared, blissfully enjoying life or frightened by some disturbing experience. I knew that by asking my mother to “sit with me”, I could again return to child-like contentment. Unbeknownst to me at the time I was developing a precious sanctuary, which even at this moment brings tears as I tap into the gentleness and tenderness that surrounds me when I am connected inside.

Most of my childhood diary entries begin with the particulars of something troubling me, and end with the resolve to “sit with that” as though writing down my resolve would somehow assure me that I would in fact “sit with that.” Throughout my life my resolve to “sit with that” sometimes only turned into action when the friction became just too great. I

recall my first year out of college, grappling with graduate school decisions and whether I would enjoy work as a college career counselor. I had been exposed to the profession while working at my university's Career Center as an undergraduate, but how would I know if I would *really* like the profession? What if I spent all my time reading resumes and preparing job search workshops, when I really wanted to "counsel" students? As worry took over I grasped for control, trying to quantify my future career into hours spent on each activity. Despite years of learning "another way," I instead turned into a hamster in a wheel, feverishly repeating the pros and cons over and over, trying to respond through logic to something much deeper inside needing attention. Of course, I inexorably failed to will any significant change in my outlook.

When the friction becomes too great, I always come back to the place inside that I implicitly trust, and I learn anew the simple insights Focusing has taught me. I asked my mother to accompany me in listening to my career anxiety. As I took a deep breath and let go into the frightened and worried place, I tapped into a trust in the rightness of career counseling, despite the many unknowns. I gratefully look back on that moment because I landed my dream job right out of graduate school, teaching "Let Your Life Speak" (Palmer, 2000) classes to college students.

When I consider how Focusing has impacted my life and the corresponding applications, I am aware that I live out the richest consequences from within. I cannot separate "Focusing applications" from my own experience with living Focusing. Somewhere in college and beyond, my physical development and life experiences integrated with years of Focusing. I developed an attentiveness which allowed the felt sense into my daily consciousness far beyond just those times when overwhelming feelings demanded my attention. The ramifications have been enormous. In the workplace I am keenly aware that speaking out of gentle inward attentiveness tends to have a disarming affect on others. When mundane conversations are somehow perceived by fragile egos as personal threats, I find inward processing allows others to let their guard down.

With students I find that allowing my organic processing to unfold in their presence invites a space for them to turn inwards as well. When I listen to students and remain inwardly connected, I feel my way into the conversations, into gently inviting them to notice what is behind their words. When I accompany students in this way, I am not thinking about what I should say next or what approach will work best based on their "Myers-Briggs" personality type. I instinctively let in the feel of the students, and the approach that comes out of me aligns with their style. My ability to be effective as a counselor directly relates to my ability to let myself respond as a person who is in relation to the student in front of me. Rather than view the student as an open receptacle for techniques, I let my approach organically arise within me as I sense my way into the student's personality.

As I grow in life experience and self-trust, I also notice myself intentionally pausing to let others' words pass by my felt-sense to notice if they "fit." I find myself saying less frequently "Oh, I wish I had said..." just moments after I leave a conversation, because I take the time to pause in that moment to let my inward sense of the situation articulate the words into speech.

Additionally, I suspect the way Focusing has cultivated gentleness towards myself also plays out in allowing others to simply be, rather than viewing their actions through critical lenses that measure their behavior according to my expectations. A special trust develops when people allow each other “to be.”

Perhaps what I most appreciate is how my growing self-trust, developed from years of Focusing, has allowed me to develop my own genuine approach in my work. I recall disillusionment in graduate school when surrounded by what felt like rote approaches to career counseling. As an impressionable, young graduate student, I was particularly affected by the role models around me. I grew disconcerted thinking the profession I chose would not tap into the original inspiration for my work. I am incredibly grateful for the inner trust that developed from years of Focusing as a child, which allowed me to slowly cut through the measured and controlled approaches to presentations and workshops that I observed in my colleagues so that I could develop my own passionate and vulnerable style.

Developing “my way” has never been easy. When I entered my first job after graduate school, teaching “Let Your Life Speak” classes to college students, I was asked to present my work to the university’s Board of Regents. Only twenty-four years old, with limited public speaking background, I freaked out! Unwilling to pay attention to my fright, I instead feverishly attempted to put together a PowerPoint presentation filled with statistics, assessment, and facts. Just two days before the presentation, nothing was coming together right. I called home crying, and my mother, of course, knew instinctively how to accompany me. As I let go into the fear, I let go of the control, and what I needed to do became obvious. I threw out my presentation and started over with renewed inspiration. I deeply trusted that sharing myself with vulnerability and integrating poignant stories from my students’ lives would connect with the audience in a powerful way. When the moment to present arrived, I walked to the front of the room and stood before some forty Regents as well as University administrators, with butterflies in my stomach. I took a deep breath and began to speak in stories, drawing on my personal experiences. When I finished, the room held an inspired silence. An elderly man in his eighties, formerly a successful executive in Silicon Valley, raised his hand and with tears in his eyes he thanked me for allowing students to explore questions of meaning, purpose, and calling in their lives because he never had the opportunity to address these questions in his own life. That tearful moment affirmed my trust in the power of letting my personal and vulnerable approach guide my presentations.

Trust has been most important and not always easy in the realm of relationships. Always less experienced in this area than my friends, I have been the recipient of their well-meaning advice. When in graduate school I pondered dating a guy who was interested in me; however, I had very serious hesitations. My friends would react to my hesitations by telling me, “You can’t go through life avoiding involvement. You can’t avoid the pain that results in breakups.” Advice is usually the product of personal experience and therefore holds a grain of pragmatic, reasonable truth, which most can relate to. Without my inner anchor, I know that such advice could easily have swayed and confused me.

I have witnessed among my friends innumerable instances in which approaches to relationships become nothing more than attempts at control. They tell me “all relationships require work.” While certainly true and reasonable, I have too often observed how this

mantra glides over inner knowing when what might be fundamentally wrong can simply be “worked on.” Most recently when I was seriously dating someone, and would express painful doubts to friends, they would with best intentions suggest taking time to “work it out.” Referring to my limited dating experience, they would ask how I could possibly know that this person was not the right one for me if I didn’t take time to “work” on the relationship?

Attempting to convince me that hesitations were normal, my friend told me that she had serious doubts just weeks before her wedding. This advice was coming from a friend who would develop a pro/con list for each relationship to determine if her non-negotiable needs were met. She addressed the question of commitment like one might approach a logic question on the Law School Admissions Test.

With a Ph.D., a lucrative career in Silicon Valley, and devilishly good looks, my boyfriend also met the culturally acceptable criteria for a “good catch.” As I prepared myself to break up with him, I was surrounded by friends who were married and having children or who at twenty-nine years of age were anxious they would never meet anyone. Despite the external noise and distractions and my limited dating experience, deep inside I trusted that my self-knowledge was a worthy guide.

In a culture which breeds disconnected behavior, Focusing has provided me with an alternative way of being. I am incredibly grateful to my mother for supporting my inward sensitivity as a child, when such attentiveness is so quickly dulled by a culture that scripts behavior. I witness mothers proudly displaying their infants and doing their best to elicit a smile. While seemingly innocuous, encouraging infants to smile for others begins to teach babies the value of programmed rather than spontaneous behavior. The minute subtleties of cultural norms set the foundation for larger patterns of behavior.

I hear stories of babies purposefully placed in front of “Baby Einstein” videos so that listening to Mozart and watching animated figures move about on the screen will develop their brilliance; however, I suspect what really occurs is a dulling of the senses when babies interact with technology rather than human beings. I watch my ten year old cousin, who is particularly scripted in her behavior, respond with a “you’re welcome” when I held the door open for her. She then immediately fumbled and caught herself because she realized the appropriate response was “thank you.” Amidst such culturally scripted behavior, I feel blessed to have learned another way, which gives uniqueness to my actions by letting my own voice guide me.

Even now I can lose myself in a culture that encourages reactive rather than reflective behavior. I could live on a flat plain of existence, programming my experiences through Ipods, TiVo and virtual cyberspace worlds. I can get lost in a workplace that rewards outcomes and productivity, which quantifies and packages experiences through the lens of time and deadlines.

Not long ago I returned home from work, and as I walked into my apartment, tears welled up in my eyes. I was feeling trapped by the workplace culture in which the inhuman bombardment of stimuli that each year speeds up experiences and moves even more quickly to “action steps,” certainly does not support the attentiveness needed to pause and pay attention inwardly. By gently attending to the “felt-sense” behind those tears, the feel of a trapped

prisoner, frantically wanting to escape its prison emerged. My natural inclination was to assist this mute prisoner in figuring out the best way to escape, or in less figurative terms, to create a way to allow the creative process I was longing for to emerge at work, even amidst the task and goal oriented environment. But the prisoner knew more than I understood at that moment. In my tremendous desire to figure out another way of being at work, I missed the obvious reality deep inside me that the prisoner already felt. The very reality of an eight-hour workday, which demands the completion of a litany of tasks, most of which require a computer to aid in the outcomes, does not allow for the time and space needed for sustained creativity.

By letting go of my desire to somehow bring the creative process more fully and consistently into the workplace, and instead allowing the mute prisoner inside me to acknowledge the unbending limitations to that approach, I surprisingly felt liberated instead of discouraged. Letting go of this desire meant I was letting go of my own cultural programming to “take action,” and this is precisely what the mute prisoner inside needed from me. I simply needed to keep company with the place inside that felt full of unexpressed creativity. Nothing changed in my workplace reality and yet everything shifted in how I felt about the situation.

What then emerged for me was the realization that in order to remain engaged in my work, I must bring my work home. I do not mean bringing home the tasks required to complete a project, but rather bringing home and creating a space for the experiences throughout the day that call for further attention. Whether it is being attentive to the experience of personal hesitation that accompanies a particular planning meeting, or the feel of “too much to do and too little time,” or a particular interaction with someone that rubbed me the wrong way, all these experiences are accompanied by felt meaning. When given attentive presence, they often unfold into new insights, leading to a shift in perspective, an ah-ha moment that may entirely change the way I feel about a particular situation, even when the particulars of the situation remain the same. In this way, I can return to work refreshed and accompany the mundane tasks with the rich felt affects of the creative process.

After a lifetime of Focusing, I still marvel at how an inner shift can change my entire perspective when the externals remain the same. I am still amazed all over again each time I experience anew the simple insights Focusing teaches about letting go and allowing what is real to share its story with me. I am deeply grateful for my growing self-trust, which is neither bounded by my environment nor wedded to outcomes. And I am keenly aware that my behavior with others is only as effective as my ability to be with myself in a Focusing way. Indeed, Focusing has been the most precious gift my mother could have given me.

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NARRATIVE FOCUSING

Discovering the Person in Chronic Illness¹

John Keane

ILLNESS AS BEGINNING

In March 1995 I collapsed at work. I was employed as a statistician for a health insurance company and was under great stress from both a heavy workload and an evening university degree program. So this stoppage at first came as a bit of a relief. This relief was short lived; I was hospitalized for three weeks and was later diagnosed with post viral syndrome or chronic fatigue syndrome. I naively believed that this diagnosis would be accompanied by a definitive plan of action — a map to recovery if you like.

Reality soon set in; I was given differing advice by each doctor and specialist that I visited. One doctor told me that I was suffering from a “little bit of depression” and to pull myself together and get back to work. I was forced to confront my experience directly, i.e., to find my own way in the world without the structure or support of well worked out guidelines. This illness confronted me with a scary, unpredictable and shaky world where no maps existed. I would have to confront my experiencing directly, but I was not aware of how I might accomplish this, as I had never even heard of Focusing. This left me in a very stuck place as I searched the world for modalities that would enable me to aid my recovery and make some sense of this whole experience.

In 1996 I spent a six-month stay in hospital followed by several years of suffering frequent relapses. My life as I knew it was altered almost beyond recognition. I found myself stranded in an almost absurd, surreal world — a world that made little sense to me. I was confronted with experiences for which I was completely unprepared. I did not know how to be a person with a serious illness. I was not prepared for the isolation that my illness subjected me to. I did not know how to reassess my life in a manner that included this illness that I wanted so badly to reject and be rid of.

This journey led me to Focusing, but this piece is not just about Focusing; but also about a crossing of Focusing with narrative philosophy and illness.² At a recent conference (2007), Arthur Frank said that he wrote *At the Will of the Body* (2002), as a means of providing a map to help him to navigate the unfamiliar territory that confronted him when he became ill. Narrative offered me a means of exploring my experience without the need to define it. I found that exploring my story in conjunction with the stories of others who had experienced chronic illness facilitated the emergence of patterns and maps that began to make sense out of my illness experience.

My MA supervisor, Dr. William Mathews, held that one can better understand the work of a philosopher if one contextualizes his or her work in relation to the questions posed by the living of their lives (see his *Lonergan's Quest*, 2005).

My journey through chronic illness forms the context of my Focusing/philosophical quest. A quest that led first to an MA (by research) dealing with the correlations between

Focusing and narrative philosophy, and now, to my Ph.D., where I am attempting to illuminate the realm of chronic illness through the lens of Focusing, the philosophy of implicit entry, and narrative philosophy.

Gendlin's philosophy has helped me to translate these insights into a form that I can begin to communicate to others. Through the use of TAE, I have arrived at several insights that were so intricate and diverse that anytime I tried to communicate what I was passionate about, I found myself wanting to say it all at once and it almost felt like I was speaking a foreign language. As Gendlin said in his 2002 TAE workshop, my language was in pain. TAE provided me with a kind of precision that enabled me to begin to express an exact richness that is an expression of *who* I am now and where I have been. From here I can begin to offer my own experience and insights to others without threatening the richness of what they already have and hold.

A STORY: A CIRCUMLOCUTION OF RELEVANCE

To help you develop your own felt sense of what I am trying to relate in this work, I am going to tell you a story.

Imagine, if you will, a man who suddenly finds himself in a foreign country. He has no passport, he has no identification. He has a little money but he does not speak the language. There is no tourist office where he can buy a map. He is scared and alone and very vulnerable. That is the kind of experience that is associated with chronic illness. (In this way, chronic illness differs from acute illness because the acutely ill person is not away from home for too long, and although he or she may return scarred and battered, his/her own old life resumes to some degree.) Chronic illness is not a delayed flight or an air traffic control strike — it is exile in a foreign land.

Chronic illness at once radically socializes the person into a medicalized world that has its own language and cultural forms. At the same time chronic illness isolates the person. Work life is profoundly impacted and the enjoyment of social life is greatly reduced. Some old good friends remain, but many are not seen again. In this foreign land one's friends can be hard to find, and a great deal of pressure strains family relations.

Your own sense of who you are and what you will become also comes under scrutiny. If you no longer work, then you are not the teacher or mechanic or professional you once were. How do you define yourself as an ill person? Your own implicit sense of your future is shattered. Will you be stranded in this foreign land forever?

Financial worries are also a real concern. Whatever money you have soon gets eaten away by hospital bills and consultant fees, etc. And because chronic illness by definition has no cure, many people also explore the expensive world of alternative medicine when conventional medicine holds no answers for them. If one has no continuing financial income, then there may be implications regarding the time and the standard of life in exile.

All of the above created real problems and situations in my life that could not continue as they had before the onset of my illness. Gendlin calls this inability to function as before "a stoppage".

STOPPAGES: EXILE AND THE ROAD HOME

In my Ph.D. thesis I have identified at least four kinds of stoppages in illness. The research for that work involved reading a wide range of illness narratives and extracting relevant patterns from those narratives. In this article I am attempting to bridge the gap between information and process i.e., not just presenting more information, but presenting information and patterns that invite further living i.e. that provide the possibility for more intricate crossing. These stoppages are:

1. *The initial stoppage.* This stoppage is the onset or diagnosis of illness. This kind of stoppage was developed from Robert McCrumb's book *My Year Off* (1999) where he described how his illness impacted upon him dramatically when he woke up paralysed, and, from John Diamond's *C: Because Cowards Get Cancer Too* (1998), where his illness was confirmed through routine medical investigations. This kind of stoppage can be traumatic and paralysing, where the stoppage is abrupt or the stoppage can seem almost like an element of a routine day, where the stoppage of illness may not be apparent now but it will impact in the future.
2. *The Reflective Stoppage.* This stoppage is where we reorganize the practicalities of our life to assist us in recovering from illness. I call this the reflective stoppage. This pattern was developed out of the narrative experience of Arthur Frank in *At The Will Of The Body* (2002), where he talks about being able to resume normal living fairly soon after his heart attack, but that his cancer was something that he had to endure and live through.
3. *Common Sense Stoppage.* This stoppage occurs when we use our existing skills to overcome the newly discovered difficulties confronting us in illness. I developed this pattern out of Lonergan's concept of common sense (see his *Insight*), and found narrative instances of this concept in many narrative cases, but most remarkably, in the case of Robert McCrumb attempting to call for help while being paralyzed.
4. *Focusing or Deliberate Stoppage.* This is the stoppage that will be investigated in this work. It is process par excellence — it is the stopped organism sensitizing itself to its changed environment, thereby changing itself and its environment in ways — until a carrying forward is found that satisfies the intricate patterning of that organism in its new environment.

The first three kinds of stoppages are aspects of the journey of illness in exile. In 1997, I made a remarkable discovery. Through Focusing, I discovered my own internal compass; this provided a beginning that enabled me to start my journey from exile. Now this has not been a simply linear journey — I have returned to exile many times, but as the journey becomes more familiar, the differing roads become easier to travel.

In 1997, I was introduced to Focusing by Phil Kelly.³ She very kindly gave me the *Focusing* book, which I immediately read from cover to cover. Rather like WH Auden said of Arendt's *The Human Condition*, I had the feeling that Gendlin's book had been written "especially for me" (Arendt, 1958, back cover). It was the right book at the right time.

Finally, I had a tool with which to begin deciphering the language that my body was trying so terribly hard to communicate. Gendlin had offered me a “Rosetta Stone” — my own “Rosetta Stone”.

I had spent two years in the first three stoppages of illness, and I had become increasingly anxious and frustrated by being stuck in exile.

INITIAL IMPACT OF FOCUSING

At first, Focusing functioned as a means of “fighting the fires” or dealing with the emergencies that confronted me as a chronically ill person; it also assisted in beginning to discover my own map of chronic illness. Anxiety and depression are almost ubiquitous elements of the illness experience (Kleinman, 1988, p.238). Focusing can be very helpful in coping with these experiences; I could now experience them apart from myself, as my “anxiety” or my “depression” — experiences that had the opportunity to develop and move forward.

As I began to interact with these felt senses, I started to listen to my body in a different way. My “felt senses” opened up and began to tell more of their story, enabling me to understand more about the roots of my illness. I was better able to understand how my current environment impacted on my health. Furthermore, I began to understand that my body contained a wisdom that helped to orient me in a different way towards the future.

The first step of Focusing played an extremely important role as my Focusing process matured. Developing the habit of Clearing a Space enabled me, in a very concrete way, to experience that my illness was only just a part of me. Up until this time I had great difficulty finding a “me” that was separate or “not consumed” with illness. Many traditional therapists label chronic fatigue as a narcissistic dysfunction; I can certainly see that from an observational perspective it may appear so. An observer could clearly see that I was narcissistic in how I noticed every little change in my body, but this was an enforced narcissism. I became preoccupied with my own body because the things I had taken for granted (something like walking to the local shops, or cooking a meal) no longer came so easily. This narcissistic tendency was a result of my illness — not the cause of it. And, one thing that I am sure of is that labeling people with chronic fatigue as narcissistic does not assist them in living with their illness.

But, Gendlin asks us not to begin from observation but from interaction (Gendlin, 1997, p.22). In one simple move (in Clearing a Space) I had put this difficult philosophical concept into practice, and it had a profound impact upon how I lived my life. (The symbolization of experience is different when we begin from the interaction first principle — I will return to this crucial point in more detail). To be able to sense a “me” that was not consumed by illness came as a huge relief.

This experience, however, also taught me something about the precision of the body. Clearing a Space was almost always accompanied by a sense of relief; yet, after some time, I found that this exercise no longer worked. I sometimes felt even worse after the exercise. As I Focused with this sense of “feeling worse”, what came for me was a sense of “manipulation”. I had formed a pattern: When I felt overwhelmed by my illness, I would Focus and Clear a

Space in order to feel better. But the discomfort in my body told me very clearly that *something* simply did not feel right. I then knew that what my body wanted, very precisely, was for the “illness” and the “overwhelming sense” to be honored — my body would not allow me to use the clearing of a space as a tool to avoid experiencing my illness.

In 1997, Phil Kelly put me in touch with Mairead O’Brien who facilitated my Focusing process for many years.⁴ Mairead is a wonderful guide, and the gentleness of her approach assisted me greatly in bringing the same kind of attention to my own experience. Mairead frequently invited me to just notice how it had been to carry my illness over the previous days and weeks. This invitation almost always came with a sense of relief and tears of appreciation, which turned out to be more than simply my own acknowledgement of a difficult experience. This confirmation from the larger environment gifted me with a concrete sense that at least what I sensed and felt “now” was *real*. So much of the experience of chronic illness involves the person questioning his or her own experience (in addition to having others question it). This experience of confirmation did not involve two separate entities; it was not just Mairead and I, but rather, the interaction solidified or concretized my experience in ways that I am still grateful for — and still trying to understand. It was at least a re-recognition of the now concrete context of my illness experience. I believe that this experience is something of what Gene Gendlin refers to when he says that the body is not just what is enclosed inside the skin envelope. It is the body interacting with the environment that includes other bodies. *As I write this I am struck that this expanded notion of the body is the doorway out of the isolation of illness.*

I can also say with conviction that through Focusing I was able to reclaim a purpose in life. I may not have been able to work and socialize as I once had, but Focusing made me a very active participant in my illness (a role that had up until then been mainly passive — looking for a cure outside of myself — stuck in the first three stoppages of illness). My new radical activity was initially simply to “care” for myself. I was beginning to find my way in this strange foreign land.

In certain ways this process was very exciting for me — but with it came even more questions. What was I doing when I Focused? How did Focusing relate to other forms of therapy? Was Focusing a form of therapy? Why was my relationship to my body and to the world around me starting to change? I understood that Focusing was an extremely useful tool. It was very effective in assisting me to relate to stuck feelings and emotions. But, somehow I sensed that there was *more* in what Gendlin was writing about. I had a sense of needing to situate Gendlin’s writings in my own life. I had a sense that Focusing was more than just a useful life skill.

I felt that I was asking important questions, and felt an even stronger need for answers. I read Gendlin’s philosophical treatises, but found them difficult to comprehend. I wanted to understand how Gendlin’s philosophy fit with other philosophical formulations.

PHILOSOPHY AND NARRATIVE

In 1999, I began an undergraduate degree in philosophy. During the course of that program I encountered another major influence in my life. I attended William Mathews’

seminars on reading lives. These seminars pointed towards a much-neglected aspect of twentieth-century philosophy — the concept of narrative identity. These concepts move from the question of human nature to human historicity, from the question of “what” a human person is, to the question of *who* the human person is. Again there was something in what he said that resonated with my sense of what I was looking for. I felt that Bill Mathews and Gene Gendlin were both pointing in the same direction.

Mathews encouraged us to read life-stories as a means of educating ourselves about what it means to be a human person. I began to read the lives of the philosophers. I also found it to be of great importance to read the life stories of people who had suffered from chronic illnesses.

Reading these stories I began to see a pattern emerge — a lot of the suffering associated with chronic illness results from a denial of illness. I began to see a cultural pattern emerge that was to be found in many of the narratives I read. This pattern was marked by the endless search for a “cure”, the kind of battle metaphors that are ubiquitous with regards to conditions like cancer. This denial is a very complex issue (and could perhaps be the subject of another Ph.D.), but as I progressed in my reading I began to understand that there was a very important element missing in my life. I was living a “life myth”. I was living a life that refused to incorporate the element of my story that was associated with illness. I may even have misused Focusing as a means to collude with this myth. Reading lives allowed me to view my illness not as something that badly needed to be resolved, but as an integral part of my story.

This does not mean that when we become ill we should surrender to our illness and openly accept it or identify with it. Rather, it means that even a struggle against illness is part of our story. This struggle was an integral part of *who* I was for many years, but now the nature of that struggle had also changed. What is at issue here is the identification with a story in which illness played a part, rather than identifying with the illness. At the crux of finding a better way to live the narrative, you find yourself being a part of it. It is now inconceivable for me to be a part of a story that does not contain illness. That is not to say that I think that illness is a positive experience. Focusing and Narrative assisted me in moving from a position of *identifying* with my illness, to one of being able to *relate to* my illness.

The concepts of narrative identity helped me to situate myself within my own narrative, and Focusing has assisted me in enriching that story. I began to see that my Focusing sessions were not just related to how I was right now, but also fit in and illuminated the developing sense of *who* I am right now.

As I progressed in my Focusing journey, larger questions started to emerge with respect to how illness impacted upon my own implicit sense of identity. Exploring my own narrative, and the identity implicit in that narrative, was of great assistance in contextualizing how my current Focusing endeavors impacted upon the larger sense of *who* I was. Reading the stories of others who had experienced illness in their life also educated me out of a certain naiveté, and functioned to carry forward many of my own stopped processes.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by this. I found that one of the emotional impacts of illness was that I was constantly on edge and anxious. Focusing allowed me to care for these anxious, vulnerable places, but the stopped processes associated with the anxiety were very resistant to change or carrying forward. All I could seem to do was to hold it gently (and I was grateful for the ability to do that). One day I was reading Michael J. Fox's memoir *Lucky Man*, and came to the moment where he mentions when, during a visit to his therapist, he shared his fear that he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. His therapist replied, "Michael, you have Parkinson's disease — the other shoe dropped a long time ago" (Fox, 2002, p223). Suddenly the organismic sensitivity (what Gendlin refers to as 'leafing and versioning' (Gendlin, E., 1997, pp.76, 85) of my anxious stoppage carried forward⁵ — suddenly I had it — my experience had crossed with the patterns that Michael J. Fox had articulated. I now knew what I was anxious about! My illness had made me feel so vulnerable and unable to respond to life that I feared another disaster happening in my life, because I did not know how I would be able to handle it. Phew, that was it! My anxiety wanted me to stop worrying about what could happen in the future, and take care of myself *now*. The other shoe had fallen, I was ill, but that was ok because I was finding ways of caring for myself, and that caring meant being present to myself now, and not spending too much time stuck in the "what ifs" of the future. This sense of being vulnerable and unable to respond to life also played a part in my pattern of denying illness — if I was constantly oriented towards the future then I did not have to acknowledge the reality of the present and the role that illness played in that present.

Another example of carrying forward came from reading Norman Cousins's *Anatomy of an Illness*. I got a felt sense that there was something in the pattern of Cousins's recovery that was important for me. He writes about how he checked himself into a hotel room after receiving a diagnosis of a life-ending illness and cured himself with laughter (watching comedy on his TV) and vitamin C. Now I had no intention of locking myself in a hotel room for months on end, but I did realize that illness had taken a lot of the joy out of my life. The process of orienting me towards the positive things in my life seemed to fit, so every morning and every evening I simply made a list of all the things I was happy, proud, and thankful for in my life. Having written the list I invited the felt sense of how all of that was for me now. I must stress that this was not an exercise in attempting to drown out the illness in my life, but rather a means of redrawing some balance in my life — everything was not all bad and all negative. I was amazed that after a short period of time the new pattern really took root in my life and resulted in my Focusing becoming a lot more powerful, as well. It was also a great lesson in appreciating the interaction between the mind and the body; the new pattern that emerged from the body helped to concentrate the mind, and so released it and the body from a limiting pattern. It was all one organism living forward in — and with — its environment.

When Mathews says that reading lives educates us out of certain naïveté's about what it is to be a human being, I believe that he is referring to this point: expanding our experience into the lives of others provides many more opportunities for our experience to cross and carry forward. The patterns of others' lives can intermesh with our own and form a much richer web of experience.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEXT

The fourth stoppage of illness, the intentional stoppage of Focusing, begins with whatever is real for one at the moment. I believe that this is the initial process, or is the beginning of reclaiming the context for ill people in finding their way out of exile.

The intentional stoppage of Focusing provides what I call the platform for latent potentiality — an exploration of the creativity implicit in chronic illness by finding the patterns for novelty and further living.

At the beginning of Section V of ‘The Responsive Order’ (1997), Gene Gendlin tells us that “Science does not include its context”. One day, while reading *A Process Model*, I wrote in the margin, “Is Focusing a self locating behavior sequence?” By this I meant: Is Focusing a way of behaving that makes you more sensitive to your flow of experience such that you can sense the context more clearly? I believe that it is at least that, as well as so much more. Focusing is at least the establishment and the development of context.⁶

I can now state very clearly that the first three stoppages of illness can leave the person very badly stuck because these stoppages involve a reorganization of our world rather than a reconstitution of the world. In terms of the ill person in exile, it is like using a map of your home country to navigate a foreign land. One may find some similarities, but invariably one can become lost or find oneself in places one did not want to go, or walk endlessly in labyrinthine of corridors where the discovery of an exit may be only accidental. In my experience of chronic illness, there is always some aspect of the reorganization that remains insufficient. Focusing as a self-locating behavior sequence can address this insufficiency; this is not the reorganization of existent entities, but the facilitation of the possibilities of living. It is the feedback from the responsive order, or, as Kevin Flanagan put it so well: “It was the sense of being talked to inside by something that was not infected by my own fears and conditioning” (Flanagan, 1998, p.78). It is the human organism forming, not out of what is already formed and unitized, but out of its own implicit intricacy.

So why is the notion of context so crucial to the chronically ill person? I believe that the notion of medical legitimization or confirmation is key to this issue, and that many of the static patterns of chronic illness are a result of the non-confirmation or de-legitimization of the patient’s experiences. The question of non-confirmation or de-legitimization centers around the notion of “symptom”. If the symptom is confirmed by biomedical investigation (observation and comparison), then it is deemed real. If the symptom is deemed not real by lack of biomedical confirmation, then the status of the symptom changes. De-legitimization robs the therapeutic relationship of its ongoing possibilities and imposes upon the patient the burden of questioning his or her own experience. In an interesting article Ware examines this phenomenon in relation to chronic fatigue syndrome. Contemporary debate regarding this condition seems to be based on the question of whether the condition has a physical basis or whether it is a psychosomatic condition:

Kirmayer (1988) has pointed to the moral implications of a diagnosis of psychosomatic illness and interpreted them in terms of the symbolic meanings attached to mind-body dualism in Western metaphysics, e.g., agency and acci-

dent, reason and emotion, control and chaos, accountability and blamelessness. In the case of “real” physical disease, medicine contrives through conceptual and practical means to distance the self from the body, thereby exempting the individual from personal responsibility for illness. In the case of psychological disorder, however, defining a problem as “mental” or “emotional” means linking it to the values associated with mind in Western metaphysics — hence the notion that psychiatric illness represents a failure of intentionality and volition, a lapse of rational self control that must ultimately be recognized to be “one’s own fault”. Despite the fact that psychosomatic medicine was originally conceivable as an antidote to biological reductionism, an attempt to bring mind and body together in biomedicine in more or less equal union, in reality psychosomatic diagnoses have come to be classed with psychiatric disorders, reproducing dualistic thinking and sharing the stigmatized status of mental illness as a disability “we bring on ourselves” (Ware, 2004, pp.171, 172).

I find this analysis both accurate and sad. This problem is not particular to medicine; we label, categorize, and absolve ourselves from the moral duty of caring for our fellow men and women in many ways.⁷ It is for this reason that I maintain that there needs to be a paradigm shift within the practice of medicine. This shift needs to recognize that the observation and comparison paradigm may be relevant to the treatment of patients, but that the caring for patients needs to be underpinned by a different model — a model that places human experiencing at its core. I feel strongly that Gendlin has provided us with the kind of engine that can drive that model by placing experience at the center. The technical treatment of a human person is always a subset of caring for the human person; until we return this basic principle back into the heart of medicine, then medicine will continue to be a system of technical interventions — and not an art where the living breathing person is seen as primary.

Chronic illness as such, can be seen as a call to radical activity, rather than the traditional passive role of the patient. If the model of medicine that we are confronted with reduces us to labels and body parts, we are then called to find “ourselves” beyond the medicalization and labeling to which we may be subjected. This radical activity of finding oneself or self-locating can be summarized as follows:

1. In the acceptance of what is *real* for you right now.
2. Discovering how that fits with the wider sense of *who* you are.
3. Using the precision of the concepts of *A Process Model*, to develop the symbols and stories that emerge in your Focusing process. (The next section will explore this area further).
4. Developing patterns for further living from the expanded context you have become sensitive to.
5. Utilizing the structure that emerges from lived experience to provide concepts and patterns that can include lived experience. These are not concepts that are based

on fixed structures, but concepts that are structured freshly and can be restructured by the patterns implicit in living.

A PROCESS MODEL, STORY, AND PATTERNS THAT EMERGE FROM ILLNESS

Gendlin tells us that the best way to read a philosopher's work is "the many times it takes, to understand how it operates differently and deeper than we could know at first" (Gendlin, 1972, p.1). I must say that I think that this need to reread and delve deeper is especially true for Gendlin. His philosophical works are difficult, but I found that once I stopped trying to fit his concepts into some neat conceptual framework, and experienced how they might function in my own life, the enterprise became a lot easier. I also felt freed-up from having to understand the concepts all at once. Instead, I am happy to let it all cross — as it will — and pyramid to form new contexts and new meanings as the concepts unfold themselves into my life.

When I discovered TAE a few years ago, it came as a huge relief. TAE contained an element of Focusing that I felt had been neglected. I had always felt that the process stopped prematurely — TAE for me was Focusing growing up and maturing. Allow me to explain what I mean. Mairead O'Brien had always encouraged me to journal my Focusing sessions. I have done this since 1996, and always found it to be a very worthwhile enterprise. I found that when I sat down to journal my process, whatever had emerged in the session e.g. a sense of trust, or belonging, or sadness, always *crossed* with so much *more* in my life. What emerged became much richer, elaborating many more patterns than the original session had. TAE provided a structure whereby a felt sense could be developed with greater and greater precision.

TAE invites us to stand again in our own experiencing and work with something we have some knowledge of, something that we want to add to the world. For me what I wanted to investigate were elaborated patterns about how to live my life forward. TAE and the philosophy that underpins it, which is explicated in *A Process Model*, helped me to develop these kinds of patterns.

The experience of illness has enabled me to understand that desired patterns cannot just be imposed upon life; life is far too intricate and precise to accept this kind of relativistic imposition. What I was looking for were patterns that my life up until now implied. Fresh new patterns emerge from all that went before: symbols, instances, and stories. When experience becomes symbolic, it turns into a pattern, a story, a kind — and does not cross in a haphazard manner. Rather, the ongoing living — the organism — demands a kind of precision that is not relative and not determined. As Gendlin says: "Two things cross only as they truly can" (Gendlin, 1997, p.53).

Following on from the TAE step of collecting facets, I collected instances from my own Focusing process that seemed to invite further living. I then used some of the other steps of the TAE process to help develop a new pattern that was relevant to a stuck/stopped area in my own life. (See References.) I will now tell you more about this experience:

As a young child I went to the natural history museum in Dublin, which was full of stuffed dead animals; I had just lost my best friend at the time — my dog Kerry had passed away. At the museum we were taken on a tour that included being led around some very rickety high balcony floors. My fear of heights began from this experience of confusion and vulnerability. While a recurring aspect of my life, it was not of great concern to me until I got sick when this fear seemed to be greatly heightened by my almost constant dizziness. Through my Focusing process I had found ways of coping with this vulnerable place — I had made a pact with myself that I would not go to high places unless I had to — and only — if that scared place inside didn't over react when I was there. This worked to varying degrees, but I felt that it was a pattern that I needed to pay some attention to, so I took the opportunity to stand in my knowledge of my own fear of heights and sense what this pattern might need.

I chose three instances that I felt were relevant to the pattern I was looking to develop.

1. One day I was talking with my father about Gaelic football, and the topic arose of the new stadium (Croke Park), that had been built in Dublin. My father said that it must be impossible to see the game from the height of the new stand there. I told him of a friend of mine who had no previous fear of heights, having to leave the stand because he got dizzy from being up so high. My father replied, "Sure wouldn't it be very easy for a fellow to get a little excited in a place like that." I felt a very strong felt-response to his words, and I knew those words held something important for me. It was something about how easily language can define and affect living. I could have described what happened to my friend as a panic attack — this definition provides very little room for living forward. Getting "a little excited" seemed much more natural to me, and I wanted some of that in my new pattern.
2. I heard Gendlin speak about the 'critic' at one of the summer schools, and what he said seemed to have a relevance to my situation. He said that the approach of acceptance and working with the critic had its merits, but he expanded on another important aspect of our relationship with our critic. To paraphrase, he alluded to a sense of needing to mature and be strong with those aspects of ourselves that would run riot and demean us in many ways. This mature, responsible stance towards the critic was a way of taking charge and being responsible for one's own process. I also wanted some of this mature responsibility in my new pattern.
3. The third instance was of September 11th. While not wishing in any way to belittle the suffering or the horror of that day, there was something in my experience of that awful day that was useful for me. Somebody asked me how the terror attack had impacted upon my fear of heights. My response was that seeing the Twin Towers fall had concretized my belief that heights can be dangerous. This concretized respect for heights was relevant to my experience. Due to my illness I am dizzy a lot of the time, so the fear of heights had a positive function in protecting me — a proper respect for heights is healthy. I felt that my new pattern also needed something of this.

The new pattern that developed from crossing these facets is “take your ease and stand strong in unsteadiness”. This new pattern replaces the old pattern that I could now also see more clearly — “keep away from heights because part of you is afraid and unsteady in the world”. What was remarkable about my new pattern was the degree of reflexivity implicit in it. The day after I started working on the new pattern, I found myself in a tall building. As I traveled upwards in the lift, I got a very uncomfortable feeling in my stomach. As I paid attention — ‘it’ said: “Your new pattern does not work” — and — as I acknowledged this discomfort, a shift occurred. “You have your pattern the wrong way around” *It* said. What was needed was: “Stand strong in unsteadiness and take your ease”. The precision of my ongoing living *knew* that the “needing to stand strong” had to take precedence. As I live my life forward, this new pattern can always be revisited, the intricacy of the instances I choose can be investigated, or other instances can be developed and crossed to create a more refined pattern.

I chose to re-pattern a behavior sequence. We can use the same kind of re-patterning to introduce creativity into other aspects of our life. For example, how does my experience suggest that I live my working life or my spiritual life in a forward moving way? In chronic illness many of the patterns of normal living have broken down — this process of taking relevant stories or snippets from life and allowing them to cross with our own experience is one kind of process where we can move forward creatively, taking into account the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves, due to illness. The ill body is a highly sensitive organism. The many stoppages of illness are constantly sensitizing themselves to their environment by versioning, leafing, looking for ways to live forward. But, the imposition of ‘any old pattern’ will not suffice. The new pattern must emerge from the context implicit in the current stoppage. That is, the story of *who* we are now *implies a next move*. This move is not predetermined or purely relative, it is the emergence of relevance that is only logical when we view it retrospectively (Gendlin, 1991, pp. 47-49). The expanded sense of story implies a ‘creativity’ that forms or sets the pattern for further development. The stoppage of Focusing, and its development into the pattern-generating possibilities which TAE can help to elaborate, can be seen as a possibility — I call it the “platform for latent potentiality”. One can then see how the stoppage of illness may be seen as an invitation to creativity, rather than just the frustration of constant suffering. I must stress that I am not trying to say that illness is a worthwhile experience because it can introduce creativity into our life. Rather, I am saying that some of the real and terrible suffering of illness can be transformed into patterns that may not have otherwise been possible.

CONCLUSION

My experience of illness has educated me out of a kind of naïveté regarding human experience. This naïveté related to how I presumed that human experience was structured and dictated by established concepts and patterns. I now realize that these kinds of patterns and concepts are not always relevant to the very intricate realm of chronic illness (and many other forms of life). Indeed, a term that has frequently emerged in my TAE work in the area of chronic illness, points to a kind of pattern showing that definite static concepts and

answers can (on many occasions) interfere with the creative living forward of the chronic illness experience. Meaning as constituted by the Focusing process is not meaning formed by comparison, but meaning as it is freshly constituted in *this* instance — a subtle but important distinction.

I believe that illness also taught me to work with, think about, and ‘hold experience’ in a much more gentle and fluid manner. Arendt tells us that: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.” The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings” (Arendt, 1983, p.104). Story and Focusing enabled me to gently contextualize and pattern my experience.

Gene Gendlin tells us that: “If one does not have the felt meaning called ‘understanding the context,’ one will only grasp a very limited, superficial part of a symbolization” (Gendlin, 1997, p.128). *Stories* (both my own and others) enable me to communicate a meaning that is not just more information, but is reflexive in its ability to assist others in “understanding the context” of my meaning. A story also facilitates (for me and others) the re-entry into the intricacy of that story, allowing it to cross still further with a more complex experience. For Gendlin, reflexivity is the identity between what is asserted and one’s procedure in asserting it (Gendlin, 1997, p.201). Focusing and Story display this kind of reflexive functional relationship in my work.

Without vibrant human experiencing (to inform and cross with the patterns of living) the pattern just becomes another old thing (just more fixed structure). The pattern will not live and breathe, live forward, and freshly form if it is isolated from its source. Patterns and concepts (about human living) need to return home (where they originated) or find a new home (where new fresh living can nourish them) if they are to grow and maintain their relevance to ongoing human living.

At the recent *Some Philosophical Concepts* conference in New York, Gendlin maintained that Focusing is more than just facilitating stuck or vulnerable places. He tells us that we should also be cognizant of: “What does the life forward process want?” Focusing certainly enabled me to care for the stuck, vulnerable places, but my ongoing process also craved new life affirming patterns out of which I could live. These patterns are essential in any form of life where the usual patterns and maps are not functioning. What my life forward process wants — and what Focusing, Narrative, and Philosophy have enabled me to begin to fashion — are reflexive and novel patterns that emerge from all of *who* I am now — and not just the imposed patterns of *who* I think I should be, or what others think I ought to be.

Narrative and Focusing allowed me to broaden my horizons, and allowed my body (that had been sensitized by the stoppages of illness) to discover a broader environment that enabled a far richer crossing within the intermeshing of the wider stories I had explored. It is my hope that these stories can cross with the readers’ experiencing, thereby creating further novel patterns of living. It is also my hope that readers will see opportunities for using stories and Focusing to broaden their own contexts, in order to develop personalized novel patterns of living — that their lives up until now imply...

ENDNOTES

1. I would like to thank Franc Chamberlain for his considerable help in editing and shaping this work.
2. The Narrative philosophy I am referring to is not that of Narrative Therapy or Narratology. I am referring to the sense of *who* the person is, as outlined by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. Arendt in moving from the “what” question of the human person to the “who” question, highlights the question of the historicity of the human person. For her, this historicity emerges from speech and action; this excess she calls story and this story is constitutive of “who” the individual human person is. In my MA thesis I investigated the similarities between Arendt’s more than conceptual “who” and Gendlin’s philosophy of Implicit Entry.
3. Phil Kelly is a Focusing Coordinator from Dublin. Phil treated me with Acupuncture, Chinese Herbs and Homeopathic remedies and assisted me greatly in dealing with my illness. One day in 1997, I was experiencing a high level of anxiety and I asked Phil about the Focusing literature that was all around her office. She offered me the Focusing book and gently touched my hand and told me that I was just experiencing an aspect of what it is to be a human being. I am still eternally grateful for that gentle introduction to Focusing.
4. Mairead O’Brien is a Focusing Coordinator from Dublin.
5. The sensitive feedback loop of these stoppages discovered a relevance in the external environment that enabled the held implying to carry forward.
6. When I use the word context, I do so in a manner different to the usual public use of the word. This work does not allow an in depth explication of its use but I can say that I use the word context to relate to how we find ourselves freshly in the world and how that finding interacts with its environment.
7. I am not writing a polemic against the medical profession or their procedures. Rather I am investigating how both the patient and the medical professional can develop living patterns that enable them to better negotiate this difficult area. This piece does not allow for an investigation of the medical professionals role in the therapeutic interaction but this will be worked out in my Ph.D. thesis.

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FROM UNDER THE COVERS A Tale of Focusing with My Daughter

Debbie Belne

My first encounter with Focusing came at a somewhat difficult and challenging time in my life. It did not take long before the fundamentals of Focusing, such as ‘making room’ for *it*, allowing *it* to be there, and learning how to listen to what *it* has to say, became an integral part of my everyday life. Slowly I began to appreciate that Focusing was not just something that I could schedule to do for 20 minutes a week, but was rather a way of *being*, with both myself and others, that was not constrained by any limitations.

As my learning of Focusing continued, I found myself struck by a nagging question: *Why had I never learned any of this before?* It seemed inconceivable that I had lived for so many years without knowing how to navigate my inner and outer worlds with the gentleness, compassion, and wisdom that Focusing offers. How was it possible that the process that brought light back into my life had remained in the darkness for all those years? It pained me to think not only of what I had missed out on, but of what others who do not know of Focusing are having to do without.

Then something clicked for me. I remembered reading an article on the Focusing Institute’s website by Mary Hendricks (2005) in which she used the phrase “teachable Focusing moments”. She defined it as “when you create conditions for the Focusing process to happen right now and then name it, or, if someone has just Focused spontaneously, you can point to it and name it” (Hendricks, 2005). As I was a novice at Focusing at the time of reading her article, I did not feel I was at the level of “teaching” Focusing moments such as Dr. Hendricks described. But something about the idea of “Focusing moments” deeply resonated with me. I felt like what I *could do* was look for “moments” in my everyday life where I might be able to bring parts of the Focusing process into my interactions. And so I began to be on the lookout for “Focusing moments”.

As a stay-at-home mom, most of my potential “moments” came in my interactions with my children. At the beginning, I used Focusing mostly intra-psychically, to help keep me grounded (and sane!). In time, I started using the process more interpersonally, for example, to help the kids make their own decisions (“See what feels right to you to do about this”). Then, on a few occasions, I had the opportunity to use more of the Focusing process when the kids were experiencing difficult issues, such as dealing with overwhelming feelings. The following is a recent exchange I had with my daughter that I would like to share with you...

At an annual eye exam, we found out that my daughter, age six, needs glasses for reading. Upon hearing the news, she became quite upset and once in the car, began to cry and emphatically announced that she did not want to (nor would she!) wear them. The situation did not improve when we arrived home — by then, she did not want me to tell anyone that she needed glasses, including her father. As not telling her father was not an option for me,

I struggled to get her to be “okay” with the situation. Nothing I did or said seemed to help. If anything, my efforts seemed to exacerbate the situation, and her emotions spiraled more and more out of control. It was clear that it was time for a different kind of approach, and all I could think of trying was a Focusing-oriented one.

I suggested that we go up to her room, where we could talk more about it. She finally agreed, and we made our way upstairs. Once there, I realized that the first thing I needed to do was help her find a way to calm down, as she was overwrought with emotion. I invited her to come onto her bed and get nice and comfy under the covers — which she gladly did. Once there, I told her how much I wanted to talk to her about the glasses, but I was having a hard time hearing her because of all the crying. I gently asked if it would be okay to try and get “a little bit quiet” so I would be able to hear her better. With lots of hugs and reassurance, she began to settle and soon she said she felt calm enough to talk.

We began by exploring what was making her so upset. After a few exchanges, what emerged was that she was embarrassed about having to wear glasses. She was afraid that everyone would make fun of her, that no one would want to be her friend, and that she would somehow be different because she wore glasses. I could see that this feeling of “embarrassed” was really big, so I tried to help her separate herself from “it” by using a typical Focusing reflection: “So there’s a part of you that’s feeling really embarrassed right now.” Boy, did that reflection not go over well! She quickly replied that it was not a “part” of her that was embarrassed — it was “all” of her! So that was my cue that what we needed to work on was finding a way to help her get some distance from “all that embarrassed.”

Onto my next Focusing reflection: “Wow... so this embarrassed is really huge. Maybe let’s see if we can make some room for it.” Again, I was off the mark with my reflection as she replied that the embarrassed was not just “really huge”, it was “everywhere”! It seems the embarrassed was in all of her, all of me, all over the room, all over the house and all over the world — really huge indeed! Another “wow” on my part, “that’s really a lot of embarrassed... maybe let’s see if we can put it somewhere so it’s not all over the place.” “It’s too big to put anywhere,” she responded, and I felt stymied as to how to help her get some breathing room from the looming presence of the “embarrassed”. As I sat with my own felt-sense of how it must feel to have something that big on me, the idea came of working to get just a small piece of it off, and so I went in that direction, “Oh yes, it is too big to put anywhere. Maybe let’s see if we can take just a really tiny, tiny piece of the embarrassed and put it somewhere.” She sat quietly, and I was not sure if she grasped what I was asking of her. So I offered a few suggestions: maybe we could put it on her bookcase, or in her closet, or out in the backyard. None of those fit. Then it came — she said we could put it in her dresser drawers. “Ah yes, we can put the embarrassed in your drawers.” “Yes,” she agreed, and with that, she felt much better. We had carved out a little space for her to be and that was enough — for now.

The next day came and she began to cry again about needing glasses. I invited her to go upstairs to talk some more, and she readily agreed. The first thing she did, completely on her own, was to get under the covers and say that she needed to calm down a bit so we could talk. I gave her some time, and when she said she was ready, we began. The embarrassed

feeling was still there. “Yes, of course it’s still there,” I said, and I sensed it was time to acknowledge its presence: “And it’s okay for it to be there.” I repeated that phrase several times, validating that it was okay for her to be having whatever feelings she was having about this issue. Then I forged gently ahead: “Is there anything the embarrassed wants to tell us?” “NO. It doesn’t want to talk,” she answered. “Okay,” I said, “That’s okay... it doesn’t have to say anything. Can we just let it know that we are here... and we will listen to anything it has to say if it ever feels like it wants to talk?” Then she did the cutest thing — she told me to wait, and she put her head under the covers for about 30 seconds, then came out and said she told “it” (the embarrassed) that we would listen if it wanted to talk. And with that we had made our first contact with the embarrassed.

At bedtime (as is so often the case), the feelings re-emerged, and my daughter asked if we could talk some more. I knew right away that she meant if we could continue talking in our Focusing-oriented way. I said “of course” and settled down next to her. I began by saying “Hello” to the embarrassed and said, “We know you’re there... and it’s okay for you to be there... and if you feel like talking now we would be happy to listen to anything you have to say... we won’t laugh or make fun of anything... we won’t get mad either... we just want to very gently listen to what you have to say.” With that she said she would go check if the embarrassed had anything it wanted to say, and under the covers she went. A few moments later she came back out and said, “The embarrassed is scared.” “Oh... so it’s feeling scared.” “Yes,” she said. “It’s scared everyone’s going to laugh at me... even Daddy” (hence why she did not want me to tell him). Rather than jump in with reassurances that her father would not laugh at her (especially since he wears glasses himself!), I stuck with reflecting back exactly what she had said. As I did this, she was able to articulate more of what she was afraid of, and I could see she was beginning to make some progress with her processing of this difficult situation.

But I still had my own dilemma: I needed to tell her father about the glasses even though she was adamant that I didn’t. How could I do what needed to be done while protecting the wishes of my daughter and the integrity of our relationship? A quintessential “both/and”!

Not knowing what to do next, I did what has become second nature these past few years — I turned inward to my own felt-sense. What came for me was that I needed to find a way for it to be okay with my daughter that I tell her dad about the glasses. I needed to help get her to an “okay place” so it would not feel like some kind of a betrayal when I shared the news with him. And so I tentatively began, “Can you maybe check and see what little thing we can do to help the embarrassed and scared feel a little less embarrassed and scared that we tell Daddy about the glasses?” Under the covers she went. When she emerged, she said there was not anything that would make it feel okay. I gently pressed on, offering some ideas: “Let’s see... would it help the embarrassed and scared feel a little less embarrassed and scared if you told him yourself... or maybe it would help if I told him for you?” She took in what I said and went back under the covers. This time when she came back she said, “It says it’s better if you tell him alone.” And so began a series of remarkable exchanges that went something like this:

“OK... so I’ll tell Daddy on my own. Maybe see what feels right for me to tell him.”

Under the covers she went and out she came with this:

“You can tell him that I need glasses, but that I don’t have to wear them all the time, just for reading.”

I reflected back:

“So I’ll say to Daddy: Erin needs glasses, not for all the time, just for reading.”

“No,” she corrects me, “I don’t have to wear them all the time.”

“Oh,” I say, picking up that my reflection was not quite right. I tried again, “Daddy, Erin needs glasses, but she doesn’t have to wear them all the time, just for reading.”

“Yes,” she says, and I can see that she is beginning to brighten up and is very much “into” what we are doing.

“Is there anything else it wants me to tell Daddy?”

Back under the covers she went. This time she came back saying:

“Yes... tell him I don’t want to talk about it any more after you tell him.”

“OK... and Daddy, Erin doesn’t want to talk about it any more with you after this.”

“Right,” she says, and I offer another invitation to see if there is anything else it wants me to say.

With that, she pops back under the covers and comes out adding:

“Tell him not to tell anyone else, not even Nana and Papy (her grandparents).”

“Ah... and Daddy, Erin doesn’t want you to tell anyone else that she needs glasses.”

“Not even Nana and Papy,” she corrects me again, and I am amazed at how attuned she is to the nuances of my reflections. This time I reflect back exactly what she has said, and then move forward in asking if there is anything else *it* wants me to say.

She thinks for a bit, and I offer some suggestions of other things she might want me to say. Amazingly (to me that is!), she does not take any of my suggestions immediately. Instead, after I have had my say, she goes back under the covers. After a while, she comes out with something that she had created herself that incorporated bits and pieces of what I had suggested. And so she added:

“You can tell him that I was very brave at the eye doctor, especially when he put the drops in.”

I carefully reflected back what she had said and she gave me a big “Right!” when I finished. Once more I asked if there was anything else it wanted to say and one last time, she went back under the covers and when she returned said:

“For you to say the whole thing!”

“OK,” I answered, and with that, I said aloud the entire “script” she had crafted. In spots she did some additional fine-tuning, and I kept repeating the whole thing until it fit for

her. Finally, we had found her “okay place” and also an okay place for us to stop — again, for now.

In the morning, my daughter came to me and said the embarrassed was ready to “come out” of her and be “sticking around” her instead. I asked what we needed to do to get the embarrassed to come out and be around her. She said to go over (again!) the way I was going to tell her dad about the glasses. So sentence-by-sentence I went over everything we had discussed — exactly — the night before. When I was finished, she smiled and said the embarrassed was around her now. I asked if it was okay with her if I told her dad about the glasses to which she willingly said “YES!!”

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SOME REFLECTIONS

On a personal, and soon-to-be professional level, Focusing has become a major part of my life. As such, I have become increasingly interested in developing my ability to weave Focusing more fluidly and naturally into my interactions. That I have been able to use parts of the Focusing process with my children has been both a joy and testament to the fundamental universality of Focusing. From my limited experience with my kids, I have seen first-hand how it is possible to use various “steps” of the Focusing process with children. Remarkably, they seem to “get it”. If anything, they readily “join in” and display an unmistakable excitement and enthusiasm for the process, even when working with difficult issues. And just like when working with adults, *shifts come* — spontaneously, surprisingly, yet consistently. And just as with adults, there is that felt-relief that comes from processing an issue from the inside out.

As I come to a close, I am reminded of how humbling this experience with my daughter has been for me. All too often my interactions with my children are anything *but* the story I described. AND — to have had this experience, even if just once — has filled me with such profound hope that there is a gentler, more respectful way of relating to each other (and ourselves). That way is Focusing. By honoring “what’s there”, no matter how embarrassing or scary or downright unpleasant and ugly, Focusing gives us the tools to find our own voice, listen to it, and live from it. What more could a parent possibly want for his/her child, let alone for him/herself. I hope you will join me in being on the lookout for “Focusing moments” in your everyday life and help continue to bring the light of Focusing into our world.

(By the way, guess who came to me crying two nights before the start of Grade One asking if we could go upstairs to her room and talk!)

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PART 5

THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS



VISION STATEMENT FOR FOCUSING ACTION STEPS AND PROJECTS

Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D.

In this overview I propose actions that any of us could undertake, and I present some of the possibilities that are asking to be done. I hope readers might want to pursue some of them.

First I try to say what it is that enables Focusing to make a vital contribution to so many very different fields. Then I urge you to form small groups of people working on a project, or on similar projects. I discuss the need to contact and collaborate with other organizations. Finally, I sketch a range of projects that are ready and waiting for someone who wants to get them rolling.

1. THE CENTRAL FACTOR IN APPLYING FOCUSING IN MANY FIELDS

In many fields there are constructive organizations that aim to create beneficial change in people. Such change usually happens only at a deeper level of inward attention. Most organizations don't know how to contact that level in people. Their main aim is often defeated because of this lack. Focusing reaches "there" in people, where what each field aims at can actually happen. That is why Focusing is a crucial addition in so many fields.

Because Focusing comes from a new philosophy, it enables a fundamentally different way of doing almost any activity. Focusing provides access to the experiential intricacy of one's situation, which generates new possibilities for carrying life forward. It also makes for empathic attitudes towards oneself and others and all forms of life. So it makes the world a better place. But here I want to emphasize how Focusing leads to developing a precise way for achieving the purpose inherent in many fields. I can formulate this best with examples.

For example: Everyone who works with schools would like the children to discover the excitement of thinking, learning and curiosity, but it hasn't been known "where" that discovery happens in a child, and how to enable a child to attend *there*. We have specific researched instructions for reaching that level in a child.

Everyone would like the jails to rehabilitate people, but it has not been known how to bring a person's attention *there* where that desire and ability can come. We have careful quantitative research showing that when violent prisoners have learned Focusing, recidivism decreases. As one domestic violence inmate said, "I have become a person who does care about the damage I have done." The prisoners report that now, when they get angry, rather than blowing up and acting out always in the same way, they go inside to see what exactly it is that is making them angry. And, they say, "Each time it's different!" (Bierman, http://www.focusing.org/rwv/alt_versions/Relating-Without-Violence.pdf .)

Stress reduction (widely used in business) is more effective when problems are found one by one, and finding where they are carried in the body. We set each problem "at the right distance" (where we can still feel it but it doesn't overwhelm us), and check in the body

whether the physical tension-relief has really happened there, or not. If not, there are more steps that can be taken. This is what we call “Clearing A Space,” the first step in Focusing. It happens to be a much more effective mode of stress reduction than the usual way of shifting one’s attention away from everything at once, and without finding where problems are carried in the body.

With cancer patients we have several research findings showing that “Clearing A Space” significantly decreases depression and generates a better relationship to one’s body. A clear space provides some hours of a physical well being which these patients have usually not experienced since they fell ill. Focusing reaches where such a life forward process can be found.

A recent book on sports tells athletes to “leave your problems in the locker room.” It’s clear that you will perform much better if you do. But the sports field knows nothing further about how to do that, let alone specific instructions.

These examples are intended to pinpoint the central factor: To reach the place in the person where *the organization’s purpose can actually happen*.

2. PROJECT GROUPS: A NEXT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The Focusing Community is quite widespread. We have 1400 members and 4000 interested people in our database, about half in the U.S. and half all over the world. Many of them are therapists, but many others are working with applications of Focusing in various fields.

People who apply Focusing in a field are typically the only ones in their organization who know Focusing. They tend to remain the only one because it is difficult to instruct one’s colleagues, and to explain Focusing without creating the experience of it. So they each remain an isolated individual in their organization. Each has developed an application of Focusing to deepen the main activity in their field, but by themselves they are usually not training others and creating a model that can be widely used.

Many are working in the same field but don’t know each other and are unaware of what other field-specific techniques focusers in their field have created. There is some exciting group activity and people are sharing what they are doing in some fields, but not yet in most.

We can also hope that out of the work will come a model, a program that is actually adopted by one agency or in one school, church, or hospital — which if successful, would be adopted by many others.

Dear reader, you can bring two or three of our people together either in one location or internationally. If you like, the Focusing Institute can offer web channels, resources, and collaboration in designing a project.

We now offer a monthly channel through which you can ask our 4000 who among them might want to work, communicate with you on a project. These connections provide a way for those working in some one field to find each other, and consider working together.

We don't promise to send every message, but we will try to do so. (Send us up to four lines.)

Forming many small groups to work together is clearly a next development we need. In most cases this is just now developing.

3. CONTACTING NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In every field there are national organizations to which local organizations belong. Our people tend not to communicate with these organizations and do not present their innovation there. At most they tell the Focusing Institute about it. As lone individuals they do not have the channels, the energy, and the confidence to make contact with national organizations that would want to hear about an innovation. Conversely, they would hear of the latest developments in that field.

In many fields we have major Focusing contributions and new books (here and in other countries). Some of those we know are listed on our web page. But our diverse contributions in the same field have not been connected. There is also as yet, no way to call national attention to these contributions. Major results could be achieved with a little coordination.

We have a great deal of serious quantitative research (see our web page: www.focusing.org) and do not need more to show the effectiveness of Focusing. We have a uniquely developed quantitative methodology for measuring first person processes by third person observational indices. What is lacking is attention to the research results by the relevant agencies in the various fields.

If some focusers in a field will work in a group, they will also become able to contact the national organizations.

4. OUR NEIGHBORS

There are now a great many organizations featuring processes that further develop human beings in various ways. I call these organizations "our neighbors." What they teach would be done more effectively in a Focusing way.

But we also need what they teach. We need to develop our bodies, our somatic energy network, our action skills, our interpersonal relations, our ways of handling conflict, how we are being in this amazing universe, to name just a few of the many human dimensions some of which we lack.

Without the other dimensions, Focusing can become a pitfall. The process is so powerful and does so much that one can easily believe it can do everything. I have argued for thirty years, "Look, it can't do everything. It can't open cans. You need a can opener." Focusing doesn't develop action skills. If you have those already, Focusing will vastly improve them, but it can't do that if you don't easily take action. If you know about energy, Focusing will guide it in an irreplaceable way, but Focusing can't do that if you don't know about energy. And so on!

The best way to contact our neighbors is with an interest in what *they* teach. Each group works hard to teach their discovery — and avoids being swamped by everything else that is being taught. So they don't want to hear from us. But if some of us want to *learn from them*, they will take time to work with us.

When we know more than one method, then what we know doesn't remain separate. Anything one knows modifies how one does everything else. If we consider a method experientially, the organism doesn't drop what it already knows. It takes only new recognitions. We develop a more effective version of every method we use. And yes, Focusing does make for an especially more effective version of every other method, because of where Focusing reaches in people.

As an individual, one cannot easily teach Focusing to one's own organization. If there is a sub-group who knows both methods, that group can make itself known to the others, and can teach their more effective version to those who want to see, learn, understand it. That would be a way to bring Focusing to our neighbors.

But there are already many Focusing people in these organizations. The problem is that they don't know each other as focusers. We always "wear the hat" that is appropriate to the place we are in. So you might have to ask our 4000 people data base to find the other focusers in an organization to which you already belong. But that can be done.

There is an enormously exciting development of the human being happening in the world. We can provide a deeper level at its very center, but only if we get together with our neighbors.

Currently each discovery is separate and isolated. The development is not yet conscious of itself. The world will change when we all become aware of ourselves as a new social development, like the towns that developed during the middle ages and brought the modern world.

5. OUR COLLABORATIVE MODEL

The collaboration:

We have an effective model of collaboration with other agencies. We provide Focusing Training for some of their staff. The project is carried out by that agency.

Each field has its own culture and known ways. The work need never be attempted by people who are unfamiliar with a setting. The Focusing Institute by itself cannot develop specialized teachers for schools, trauma workers in foreign countries, medical counselors, nurses, or people knowledgeable about business. The specialized trainings are created when we teach Focusing to some staff members of an organization in that field. They know the field in which they work. They are experienced in that setting. And, they are not lone individuals but staff members of an organization in that field — and now they are also Focusing trainers.

For example, our Afghanistan project is a collaboration with the American Friends Service. Some portions of the project were funded by UNIFEM. Dr. Omidian, the head of the team, is a staff member of AFSC who was trained in Focusing by our Ann Weiser and Nina Joy Lawrence. Now she is jointly a Focusing Trainer and the field representative for the Quakers. She is a medical anthropologist. AFSC provides the physical space, a salary for Dr. Omidian, and contacts.

Our team trains indigenous people — aid workers, student interns — who in turn teach Focusing in the villages. To date, some thousands of Afghans have learned, and in turn are teaching Focusing. Some of those particularly good at teaching Focusing are now Certified Focusing Trainers and participate in an International community of other Focusing Trainers. A similar project is going on in El Salvador.

Two members of the Afghanistan training team presented at an international conference in Jordan, and have now been invited to design programs in Pakistan, Indonesia, Rwanda, Lebanon, Gaza Strip, and Northern Iraq. Now we will look for funding to build on these promising possibilities.

A team of our trainers has been coming to Romania and Hungary for many years. They teach psychologists, care givers in orphanages, and others. The head of the team, Marta Stapert, from the Netherlands, has been awarded the Knight's Cross of Merit by the President of Hungary, and was specifically lauded for "not just coming in and leaving, but staying with the program to really train Hungarians so that the team is no longer needed." Again a number of gifted Hungarian Focusing teachers have been certified by the Focusing Institute and participate in the International community of Focusing teachers.

In this collaborative model we contribute just what **only** we can do: a) focusing training, b) designing the projects, c) providing resource and training materials, and d) helping projects stay on course.

Our functions:

- a) We have hundreds of Certified Trainers all over the world. Our Focusing Training can also include the partnership process and TAE for articulating and innovative thinking.
- b) The project design aims at integrating Focusing into the most advanced work in a field. We regularly find that this involves working with characteristic detail of that field on a level of great specificity.
- c) Of course we have a great deal of Focusing material. In some fields we have also accumulated applications that a person working in that field would profit from seeing.
- d) Maintaining continuous contact between the individuals and with us, as well as with the other agency, is not easy as long as working together is not a habitual mode.

Eventually a project group would have its own director.

Funding for individual projects:

Once a pilot project succeeds, funding can be applied for jointly, by the Focusing Institute and the collaborating agency. We need not convince a funding source on the basis of our voice alone. The joint approach should make funding for individual projects more likely.

Project design and redesign:

We design the project together with people from the given field. This is a sensitive process that takes time. We keep close tabs on the project, provide resources, and meet difficulties together. If a first pilot project fails, we and those who carried it out redesign it together.

Each of our projects is a model. If it fails in the pilot stage, we redesign it, but if it is successful at that stage then the design and results can be widely distributed and adopted. The projects we design have the effect of centrally recreating how the main process in that field is understood and done.

In each case the “central” spot is how to reach “there” in a person where the desired result can actually happen. Although the philosophy and basic training are the same across fields, each project has to be a collaborative product between us and people in the field. The result will be a precise new Focusing-identified process in that field.

Returning to my opening theme, why can so many different activities be done in new more effective ways with Focusing? I hope many people will articulate this. I think it is because we don't have to stay with separate items, give them artificial connections, then try to impose the result on ourselves. The implicit, murky at first, soon opens into so much more, all already interrelated from underneath, genuinely — even embarrassingly real. The implicit ranges down into the universe where life flows up, and moves forward into little steps of “Oh...” and “Hmm...” which have the person's unique intricacy and flavor. The steps come from directly sensing the edge of what is right there but implicit.

Please don't spend years under the impression that Focusing is all one needs. We need to learn many methods for developing ourselves along many dimensions. Instructions for these methods succeed when we carry them out at that edge, “there.” Then we soon have new specifications to contribute to that method.

The cultures seem to know nothing about the unique person and this level of sensing into any large or small thing. But now a world is forming in which so much of the human person will no longer be left unseen, in which we treat each other and ourselves so much better because we feel-understand the implicit sense we make, and we will be understood when we undertake things from there.

This isn't something one person can state. If you feel something of this sort, please work to think and say it more and more.

Thank you.

POSSIBLE PROJECTS

Just a few. Vastly more is being done than I could ever keep track of, and that makes me very happy. I can't possibly mention all the promising work that is going on. (See www.focusing.org.) These are just samples. We assume you will do in your own way precisely what you find most valuable.

A great range of promising projects are begging to be carried further. They would almost certainly be funded individually, once they are more developed.

VARIOUS SERVICES FOR USE BY ANY ORGANIZATION

Authentic entry:

Many "Changes Groups" have continued for years, but only in a few countries have they been used as a model. We know how to improve any kind of meeting by providing Focusing instructions.

Break-out groups service:

Providing a structured hour for breaking into small groups for Focusing and Listening.

INSTITUTIONS WHERE FOCUSING COULD BE BUILT IN

Churches

Hospitals

Jails

Schools

... many others

APPLICATIONS TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Adolescents:

We observe (although we have no research, yet) that Focusing can often be immediately used by populations generally considered to be difficult (and also not very verbal). This includes inner city children.

No lengthy instructions are required for them, just point at the chest and stomach and ask, "What comes for you in here when you say that?"

Elderly:

A method combining Focusing and Caring Touch has worked well in old age homes. We have a training manual for aides. There is a research finding that Focusing increases longevity.

Alcoholics (AA):

Many individuals report that several of the 12 steps are enhanced with Focusing. Some have integrated Focusing into the specific 12 steps.

“Borderline”:

So-called “borderline” patients have been “difficult” to work with, but we find that many of them can immediately use Focusing and Listening. This is the case also with inner city children and adolescents.

Cancer patients:

“Clearing a Space” with cancer patients significantly lowers depression (and may have significant medical effects).

Children:

In class the children pay better attention when they have a clear sensorium gotten from Clearing A Space. That includes the “Focusing Attitude,” being friendly with one’s feelings about each problem. One child said, “I wrapped my problem in a blanket.” Some teachers use Clearing A Space to start the class. The kids look forward to it. It may improve grades and reduce disruptive behavior. (See The Children’s Corner on the web page, which lists three international conferences, books, and articles.)

Dialogue groups:

Bohm’s “Dialogue” groups (and others) tell people to consult their “kinaesthetic” sense before speaking, so that discussions will not stay on the surface. But it has not been known what this really means or how to reach “there.” The head of one such group tells me, “They just stay in their heads.”

Doctors:

A recent book by Barry Bub presents Focusing and Listening for use by physicians for themselves.

Hospices:

For many years, Focusing and Listening have been very helpful to the dying.

Infants:

Zack Boukydis has articles and films dealing with this area.

Trauma:

A network of aboriginal people in Canada for victims of early abuse.

APPLICATIONS TO VARIOUS FIELDS

Art:

An architect in Austria writes: “Today art is individualists but people don’t know what a human individual is. To design a building they take little motifs from other buildings and combine them. I ask students to get a felt sense of one of their favorite buildings, then design a totally new building from that felt sense.”

Bodywork:

Better results have been observed when people do Focusing *inside* during the hands-on work on the *outside*. Alternatively, some workers have found that after a pause for Focusing, the body work goes deeper. (We have no research on this as yet.) Focusing has been integrated into a number of methods. (A group and several individuals, relating to the Alexander Technique, Hakomi, and many others; two international conferences).

Business:

Focusing has been employed for creativity, decision-making, more productive meetings, better workplace relations, discovering new possibilities.

Dialogue:

Several “dialogue” movements emphasize “tapping into tacit knowledge” and “kinesthetic sensing” before speaking, so that meetings can consist of more than surface arguments. The originator of one of these says, “but most people stay in their heads.” We have specific instructions for what is intended.

Dreams:

See “Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams” on our web page. Also dream groups.

Energy work:

The relation between Focusing and various energy procedures is currently being explored by a number of people.

Community and psychosocial work:

Our Afghanistan project, now also in Pakistan and El Salvador.

Medicine:

Focusing helps reach psychosomatic effects in a person and the place where holistic healing can happen. Among many research findings, Focusing improves the immune system.

In Europe some HMO’s provide Focusing training as prevention. It costs little and saves them a lot of money and time.

Our pattern of Focusing partnerships is also promising in this regard.

Medical schools are widely reexamining their training to relieve the terrible pressure, but the “Clearing a Space” way of relieving it isn’t yet known there.

Meditation:

We have a long line of successive writings showing that Focusing deepens meditation and prevents various unintended pitfalls of meditation.

Psychotherapy:

Referrals to Focusing-Oriented therapists. Gendlin, E., *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy*, Chapter 11 deals with integrating the different avenues of therapy.

Reproductive rights:

Enabling women to articulate their voice in this field

Spirituality:

Buddhist, Catholic Biospirituality, Jewish Renewal, Quakers, Sufis

Sports:

A major recent book on “psychological skills” in sports tells players to “leave your problems in the locker room.” It is known that this idea helps, but no specific instructions for how to actually do it are provided. We have them. There is a great demand, but it is not yet well known that specific and tested training for this exists.

Stress reduction:

The first step in Focusing, “Clearing a Space” (or “making a space”) sorts, one by one, the problems the body is carrying (each time sensing whether something has released in the body, and what to do if it has not.) This process has superior results when added to the usual stress reduction methods.

Thinking:

TAE “Thinking at the Edge”: Specific steps for articulating what cannot currently be said in the existing public language. A little-known use of language directly from Focusing comes with new phrases that can say (the meaning) differently. Sometimes these phrases can also become precise, logically connected new theoretical concepts.

Writing:

See Sondra Perl’s book *Felt Sense: Writing with the Body*, with precise instructions and a CD.