

Implementing Focusing with Kindergarten Students in an Elementary School

By Diane Baumgart, PhD

I began my certification process in Inner-relationship Focusing with an intention to use Focusing with adults. However, in Helen Brenner's Focusing Course "Go for it", I found I had a passion to conduct focusing with children. I was volunteering as a mentor with children at the elementary and middle school level. While volunteering during a noon recess with a young boy, I had the opportunity to resolve a serious conflict. I reached a decision that day for my Focusing project. I would follow my passion to do Focusing with children in an elementary public school.

I approached the Principal and School Counselor at an elementary school in October about Focusing. I had previously volunteered at this school as a Mentor and had done some professional consultation in this district in years past and gained a positive professional history with both of these administrators. I called the Principal who was positive about the Focusing idea, who then referred me to the school counselor. I sent a flyer to the counselor proposing a scenario of students not completing and turning in their homework as an issue for Focusing. I discussed Focusing as a skills program for learning emotional intelligence skills. She was cautiously enthusiastic. We met in December, the last day before winter break, and agreed to begin Focusing sessions in the school. This discussion was crucial for delineating the parameters of the project and our mutual understanding of what and how Focusing would occur. The counselor and I came to an understanding on issues and concerns with the proposed project. These included

1. What is Focusing and what is the relationship between Focusing and Emotional Intelligence skills?
2. Students who might benefit and students who teachers might recommend:
3. Assurances that Focusing was a skills program not therapy or a treatment program;
4. Issues of pulling children from academic instruction;
5. Liability and confidentiality issues;
6. Supervision of Focusing sessions;
7. Evaluation of student social skill and Focusing skill acquisition in sessions;
8. Social skills and teacher lists of requested behavioral changes of the students;
9. The transition in classroom climate change for students from their academic to focusing classroom; and
10. My commitment to conducting a certification project, not a research project.

I list these questions not because I was prepared in advance to answer or ask them but because I was ready to discuss them as they arose. My knowledge of the education system, my work with teachers and students, and my teaching experience and certification program in Inner-relationship Focusing prepared me to have the discussion in a casual and open manner. I was surprised the discussion on the last issue, #9 above, seemed to be the green light for the project. Without that knowledge and experience we may have proceeded but not as confidently. We ended this December meeting with an agreement to begin Focusing with kindergarten students in March and meet in late February to share some information on children and my Focusing lesson plans.

My Professional Preparation in Education

I have a doctorate in Behavioral Science from the University of WI -Madison and worked with children, youth and adults for 30 plus years in a variety of educational settings. The children selected for the Focusing sessions have challenging behaviors, but my experience and professional preparation encompasses these and a wider span of behaviors. For 20 plus years I professionally designed communication systems for children and youth who are non-verbal and challenge the system with behaviors. I am used to looking for disruptions during routines as expressions of communication intents. Although these Focusing sessions were not explicitly designed for communication, I often see and listen to “behavior as communication” (Baumgart, Johnson, Helmstetter, 1990). For example screaming and pushing could be used to say “NO” or “STOP”, grabbing could be used to say “WANT” or “MORE”. Slamming doors could express “I am really angry”. Not judging the behavior as inappropriate and proposing some communication intent allows a hypothesis to form on a potential communication intent underlying the behavior and an educational response. I was conducting Focusing sessions (using the term Emotional Intelligence skills with teachers) and I used my communication training to support my teaching and reactions in the sessions.

Focusing Group Parameters

The counselor set up the Focusing sessions. The schedule included two groups of kindergarten students who were selected by the teachers. One group of 5 (later expanded to 6) met 8:50-9:10 and another group of 5 (also expanded to 6) met 1:00-1:20. I was provided a list of students’ first names and behaviors still not within the repertoire of each student after 6 months of social skills training (Skills for Social and Academic Success, Kindergarten to third grade, 2011).

Teachers described these children as performing significantly behind their age peers in social skills and academic behaviors. The counselor scheduled the counselor's office for conducting sessions. It contained a desk, bookshelves, credenza, an adult sized large round table, play materials, and eight adult chairs. Little movement was possible in the space. The 20-minutes allocated included the transition from two different classrooms and the library to the office down long halls. I felt this time allocated left little time for Focusing with students!

Focusing Session Structure

The children are used to puppet scenarios with their Social Skills 2cd Step curriculum. I observed skits and role-plays conducted by the counselor in classrooms using this curriculum. The classroom students attended to the puppets, skits and interacted with the puppets and each other although I did not observe the students selected for Focusing in these classrooms.

I felt continuing with puppets was an excellent option. I wrote and designed scenarios and skits where one puppet has the role of "wise one" and one or two puppets take on the roles of having a "problem" behavior or issue and expressing certain feelings. I planned on being a witness, participant, facilitator and commentator rather than the teacher. Allie and Rocky (alligator puppet and raccoon puppet) are the two characters in skits and Ms. Cow is the knowledgeable "wise one" puppet. I purchased these puppets at the local thrift store for \$0.50 each and sanitized them. The scenarios, skits, materials used and reflections on each session are in Baumgart, D. *Focusing Activities for Kindergarten Students* (2015).

Initial Focusing Plans

Focusing is a skills program, "a body-oriented process of self-awareness and emotional healing" (A. Weiser Cornell, 1996).

Emotional Intelligence involves perceiving, understanding and regulating emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Salovey & Meyer, 1990). The term Emotional Intelligence is used in the educational field and I used it to introduce my session plans to teachers and taught Focusing skills and used the word Focusing with the students. I taught Inner-relationship Focusing skills.

I did not want to begin Focusing by relying on students to express their feelings. Their feelings may not be readily sensed in the body, they may go right into a story and/or it may not be or feel safe to reveal some sensations or feelings. I decided to use activities that might elicit sensations, emotions, or feelings in the children. I began with a list of comfortable feelings (e.g. feeling happy, helpful, generous, pleased, or proud), gradually moving to uncomfortable feelings (e.g. feeling surprised, disappointed, confused, frustrated, sad, or angry). I wrote scenarios and fine-tuned them week-by-week, based on how the children were interacting and what they were or were not expressing. Some instruction was needed to teach vocabulary and process (e.g. what is breath, how to breathe, going inward, awareness, how to use art materials, how you know you will get a turn, lining up to leave).

I planned to use the puppets and gradually use activities or games without the puppet props. I found this was not possible until the last two weeks of the semester. I thought the children would learn faster given behaviors to model from the “wise” puppet and seeing the change in behaviors and commentary from the other puppets. This was difficult for them. Their own feelings often overwhelmed them (including feelings of helping, surprise, excitement, confusion resulting in grabbing or hitting the puppets, hiding their faces, avoiding responding or running around the room). I changed the flow of the activity sequences to a variation of that below:

One, doing a hands-on activity as soon as they entered to facilitate being present in the counselor's office, either standing or sitting (easing the transition to a change in classroom climate);

Two, watching and hearing the puppet with a problem;

Three, observing a short response by the wise puppet;

Four, sensing within for inner sensations, feelings, or emotions within, occasionally with a prompt and a small puppet friend on their lap and using art materials to acknowledge these;

Five, assisting the targeted puppet(s) following the model of the "wise" puppet; and

Six, sensing within themselves whatever arose with the resolution of the scenario using art materials to acknowledge what arose.

I found that the students were more attentive and engaged if they had short scenes followed by hands-on action. This often worked best if the actions were provided and defined by the "wise" puppet and students were invited to assist me to move the puppets or other props in the scenario. I incorporated the body map handout (R. Veugelers, 2012) and discussed by P. Levine and M. Kline (2008) as a means for students to acknowledge and describe their sensations, feelings, and/or emotions. A large variety of art materials were available, along with stickers, sticks, rocks, feathers, clay, and other tactile materials. I often changed the scenario and skits to assist students acknowledge inner sensations as their interactions with these materials and verbal comments indicated support they might need to continue and resolve the situation for themselves or of the puppets. It really did seem that these puppets were "real" for the students. I often repeated a scenario or expanded it the next week if I felt students needed more time with certain feeling. I often changed the afternoon

session to incorporate what I learned implementing the morning session.

I underestimated the amount of time it would take for the children to move from comfortable to uncomfortable feelings. I had not anticipated how easily they became overwhelmed. They often wanted to “own and hold “ all the puppets or all the art materials, closed up and become non respondent, tipped over their chairs, interrupted, complained or left the activity and took materials from the counselor’s desk or drawers. I eventually used these behaviors for Focusing in the present moment (a chime and a prompt “ I am sensing perhaps you are feeling something.”) and for designing scenarios. These changes resulted from, in large part, my Focusing sessions with my partners or myself. Some of my Focusing sessions are described as reflections in the following pages. Some are described, along with the scenarios in (Baumgart, D, 2015).

Evaluating Expectations

Focusing was new to the teachers and administrators in this school. Focusing with children one-to-one was not new to me but Focusing with a group of children was new and I found it intimidating with these students. I used the teachers’ list of behaviors for students to compile a checklist so I could monitor changes. The checklist included respecting personal space, listening, in seat work, following directions, staying on task, interacting appropriately with peers, sharing, turn taking, waiting, following hall routines, working independently, respecting property, trying new or taxing tasks, and managing or regulating emotions. I designed a data sheet using these skills and used an educational time sampling observation technique to monitor behaviors over time. I wanted frequency data of each student on these behaviors during project implementation. I also checked the overlap with skills in the 2cd Step Social Skills Curriculum, Focusing skills I was

teaching, and the behavior checklist and shared these with the counselor and teachers. There were many overlaps.

I anticipated an increase in behaviors on the checklist and an increase in acknowledging and describing and thus managing comfortable and uncomfortable sensations, feelings and emotions. I hoped this data and the tools would assist me to illustrate the efficacy of Focusing. I was certainly curious to determine if Focusing made a difference in the sessions and in the classroom.

Tensions

I was surprised to feel such tremendous tension as a guest teacher. I found using a “new” strategy and not viewing behavior from a totally behavioral perspective magnified the tension I felt in this environment. A behavioral model often judges behaviors as good or bad. Bad or inappropriate behaviors are to be extinguished or reduced in their intensity, duration or frequency. This usually implies a reward or punishment system. I wanted the behaviors to wane but for a different reason. I want the behaviors to diminish not because of restrictions, rewards or punishment but because of new Focusing skills, offered new options.

I also was finding student behaviors like the grabbing and hitting, disruptive in the Focusing sessions. I felt these students challenge the system and I felt challenged as well. Some days I doubted I should continue. Being unsuccessful was always an option. Acknowledging that the students’ success was the only important goal was what continued to support me implementing the project for all concerned. I wished the room did not have a large window on one whole wall open to the office and all therein, but it did. Some days I felt like I was on a wide screen TV.

Before I provide my Focusing reflections below I want to acknowledge the school counselor as an exceedingly competent, wise professional, well liked by the students and with a great sense of humor. The students have tremendous respect and genuine affection for this professional. I also want to acknowledge the professional skills of the classroom teachers and their genuine regard for students. I met all these students knowing only their first names and having the list of behaviors from the teachers. By the third session I saw behaviors in the hallways that clearly indicated the students' behaviors could be extreme, out of control and/or harmful. I know the counselor's presence in these sessions set a tone for the students that facilitated the sessions and the Focusing. She was so wise not to leave the sessions all to me at first!

Reflections after the first four weeks

I had a week break after four weeks of teaching one session per group per week. Although the break was prescheduled, it was a critical break for me to reflect and review data. I scheduled self-reflection and Focusing sessions with my regular Focusing partners and discussion of the project with my Focusing certification classmates. These sessions resulted in areas where I could alter my approach and energy. I share some of what arose in these sessions below.

The first reflective session was during a certification class where we shared our projects and sought input. I shared that my project was ongoing and both exciting and frustrating. I was frustrated with the process of the sessions and the tension I felt regarding differing philosophy and teaching methods. I described behaviors that had arisen, including chairs tipping over, students flinging their torso on the table, grabbing art

materials, wandering, not responding, and taking materials from the counselor's desk and desk drawers. I described the counselor and aide intervening within sessions verbally and with physical restraints. I described my inability to act quick enough to reflect the behavior as "you are hitting and shaking the puppet and you need to gently put him on the table". I described an activity with two students (others watching) where I had to use most of my arm and core strength to restrain a student from hitting another student with a hula-hoop while acknowledging how strong he was and successfully navigating the hula-hoop around the personal space of another student. I wondered how often I wanted to work this physically hard in order to avoid a huge discipline "eruption". I felt concern about handling this type of behavior on a regular basis. I also described dreaming nightly about the students and of yearning to Focus with them in the sessions. Yet Focusing was not happening. My tension over wanting Focusing and maintaining order were increasing. I told them I went to my car after packing up the previous week and thought, "Just quit. I am not up to this tension and not feeling authentic in what I am doing."

I did not plan to describe my project in this way, but it was a relief to express feeling sad, frustrated, tense, irritated, embarrassed and exhausted. I felt heard and supported. Class members mentioned work by Stapert, M and Verliefde, E (2008), Bowers, L (2008), Rappaport, L (2009), Veugelers, R. (2012, 2014). I reviewed these works. I felt renewed by class discussions and the Focusing work but not "aided" in "what to do". The systems these class members and authors discuss are different than this public school. However I did feel encouraged by the published works and the listening offered by my classmates. I felt I would and could continue.

The next day I Focused with a regular partner. What came during this session was that I am too consumed with the project and I yearn to Focus with the students as I did in individual sessions. The word YEARNING was important and as I stayed with this feeling it evolved into wanting a deeper connection with the students. In addition my feeling tense in the school and wanting other enjoyable activities for myself arose loud and clear. It felt refreshing to find these feelings both there together. Then I felt a flash and heard something say my “preplanning was extensive but not really that useful. Stop preplanning so perfectly and spend time with your friends.” I sat with that and saw myself bent over a computer and then saw images of running horses. Staying with the feel of the images I noted something was overly concentrating on the planning and just getting through each session by following a planned sequence. Over planning was interfering with my teaching and flow of Focusing. The images of the horses brought a feeling of teaching and flowing. A softening within my chest happened (something shifted) and a big opening of space came, followed by a sigh of relief and then calm arriving in my body. I left the writing of next week’s scenarios as a brief outline.

The third day of the break, I Focused alone. I invited the tension I feel in the school as my issue and Focused for about 20 minutes. What came was that the other kids are not “companions” at this time and neither is the counselor or the aide. It is NOT SAFE now to Focus with individuals in the sessions. I found an understanding. If “presence” in the group or even attention, respect and quiet is not there, it will be hard for even one student to become aware and attend to their sensations and feelings. That felt like something I had not fully taken into account, at least not in this way. At this time these are not students who will wait or listen for very long. This

knowledge assisted me to move beyond feeling captured in both my tension and my YEARNING to do Focusing. I invited my awareness to sense how I feel in the group when behaviors disrupt the flow or other students. I saw my teaching moving away from individual work with students to taking group pauses (as needed when behaviors were disruptive) during activities. I saw myself letting go of the planned activity as structured and a big open space appeared. I am not clear how this will look in my teaching, but I sense that the HOW will come. At least I feel very relaxed about this letting go of my planned activities.

The fourth day of the break I Focused for 30 minutes with a second regular partner. The issue was the constant dreams and daydreams that continue day and night that I am finding exhausting and wanting them to stop.

I acknowledged the sensations in my throat and chest feeling tight and irritated. I sense the movies as a taunting presence of what is not happening and say "hello" to that. Then I sensed the movies running in the background and something wanting me to pause and watch a movie. I sensed some curiosity about the movies and a calm sense in my torso.

The movie was vague and I stayed with it as vague. It took some time to become clear. AHHH, I sensed the yearning sensation, a longing type of yearning. As I acknowledged this longing, I see the movie, I watch it and sense it is NOT about what I wish could happen but rather a demonstration of what I could DO with a short PAUSE in each session. I see the kids coming into the room and I institute a pause as they enter. I sensed this body message, this movie, is a demonstration of a way to USE a short Pause and a breath or two **as a transition or before behavioral reactions arise**. I sense this is **how** I could use a Pause. It seems in these movies *I was showing*

myself what to do!! Spaciousness fills my chest and I felt my shoulders relaxing and my tension with the project dissipating.

Later in the day as I wrote on this session, I noted I am still aware of the movies but my attitude is different. I no longer see them as a taunt of what I yearn for but rather as a demonstration of HOW to Focus with this young group of students. My sense of feeling irritated is gone. Just then I became aware of a movie and I began taking a Pause. In the movie I was using a Jingle with the pause. I reviewed Helen G. Brenner's book (2004) and found her description of a Pause. I wrote a jingle (Baumgart, D 2015) and named it a PAUSE ABC for the students. The next morning I recall I have some hand instruments and find an instrument called the Wow-Earth Bell (1994) in a cupboard. It rings with a delightful chiming sound and can be easily used by the students.

The fourth day of the break, in the evening, I Focused alone. I sense how I had planned out activities from week one to week fifteen. I initially wrote out 15 activities and crosschecked them with the schools social skills curriculum to ensure there was overlap. Both my activities and the social skills curriculum had sessions on personal space, helping, sharing and emotions such as happy, sad, angry, jealous and proud. I sensed I had planned the sequence as proceeding to a new emotion/feeling each week without knowledge or experience of these students. I pondered how behaviors from my list and the school curriculum, like sharing, are likely not fully available until each child can sense and acknowledge their feelings of *not wanting to share* or *not having enough*. Typically, a behavior of theirs such as NOT RUSHING TO GO FIRST, IS MERELY "CONTROLLED OR NOT CONTROLLED until something feeling a WANTING within is sensed and acknowledged. Within this perspective, students likely would not stop grabbing adults or running into them for a hug (YES it does hurt) until they can

acknowledge they sense something, like WANTING a hug. The same could be said for the other behaviors, such as pushing, rushing to be first, interrupting, or grabbing. These students were not READY to proceed to many behaviors such as polite asking or sharing until they had awareness and skills to sense personal space and **feelings**. I needed to slow down until they could be aware of and acknowledge their feelings and feel safe to do this. I also understood more deeply how I could be Self-in-Presence to support these skills evolving. How different this was from using punishment, rewards and logical explanations. I felt empowered to explore Focusing more.

I felt that other students in kindergarten might acquire these skills in one or two sessions or might come to school “ready” to advance in the social skill curriculum as taught. These students were going to need 5-6 sessions and various activities on the same theme before they would sense and acknowledge their feelings inside and learn and practice the skills to listen to them with Focusing, or, as discussed in emotional intelligence charts, “regulate” them. They were currently not aware of their feelings, were becoming merged with them or trying to exile them.

I revised my outlined sequence and schedule. I added 5-6 activities using the puppets where the children were involved in first helping the puppets take a PAUSE and sense a feeling coming from *helping a puppet that expressed a target emotion*. After many variations and monitoring their feelings I could design activities for them (without puppets) where they could help each other in an activity or complete an activity in pairs. This session really clarified for me the children needed me to SLOW down and teach much smaller steps in contacting their sensations/feelings in the Focusing process. They needed many opportunities with the same feelings and many demonstrations using the puppets and lots of practice in SAFE situations.

Later in the day I graphed the data on teacher selected behaviors of each student. This was not data on Focusing or Emotional Intelligence skills but typical time sampling behavioral data collection on the behaviors on the teachers list. If Focusing had an impact, I would see progress reflected in behaviors decreasing or increasing as appropriate. The graph would demonstrate the pace of each student's progress. After four sessions I saw was little change in requested behaviors in all but one student.

The last weekday of break I Focused alone for thirty minutes. A vignette played of an actual situation with this group where a kindergarten student interrupted over and over " I want a turn. Will I get a turn? When is my turn? Will I get a turn? Can I get my turn" as she tugged at my arm, pulled my shirt, and grabbed materials. I had explained, "getting a turn" already and responded to her saying " NAME, I hear what you are saying and right now I am talking to everyone about today's activity." I sensed in this Focusing session how unsavory I felt about that response and how it merely shut her down. I sensed how turning just to her with Focusing or explaining turns again was not likely to work for her or the group.

As I sat with something feeling unsavory, the vignette changed. In this vignette I placed markers within reach of each student and put a sheet with a body drawn on it at each place. As NAME says she wants a turn repeatedly, I turn to her and make eye contact and smile, as a means of acknowledging her, and say" Hmmm Let's all take a Pause...ABC. I hear you want a turn..." I ring the chime and say the Pause...ABC jingle as all the students breathe slowly, sensing what is there inside and saying hello to that by marking on their body map. I ring the chime to signal coming back to the activity and what is next in the activity. The puppets demonstrate the activity, I pass out materials and the students participate.

I saw, by watching the vignette how much these students love drawing on their body map papers, SO MUCH in fact that they can handle a short PAUSE, RESET and the RESUME. I realize I can use an outline and Reset and Resume myself as the students react in the activities. Later in the day I make plans to spend the rest of the break out of town, hiking.

The following Monday, during a certification class attunement, I acknowledged silently and in writing, all my qualms about this project and its pitfalls. I listed all the many behaviors that occur in the session that I found disruptive.

I look at the list and see these behaviors more as opportunities than disruptive. I can and will include a PAUSE and sensing what I can teach with the materials right then rather than teaching the completion of a planned activity. I need to be creative, in the moment, and rework to arrive at some completion for the students. I am now excited about this prospect. Whew! I do not yet know how this will play out but I feel it will be better than what I was doing and will satisfy this YEARNING I have to have a deeper relationship and compassionate connection with these students.

Progress Summary

The students

Gradually, over the twelve sessions the students became engaged in the activities, responded to invitations to take a Pause ABC, learned to attend inward make contact with a sensation or emotion (Focusing skill set) and increased their social skills. Walking down the hall to and from sessions occurred with less pushing, shoving and running and attempting to be the leader or “first” rarely occurred in the

hallways or sessions. Hall etiquette may have resulted anyway since this routine is repeated many times daily.

I summarized the time sampling behavioral data collected over the sessions. The behaviors (social behaviors and learning behaviors) requested by teachers increased in all students. The greatest change was an increase on skills on the checklist from 30% to 95%, the least was from 85% to 95% and the average increase was from 65% to 90% increase. One student's change was so dramatic at week three that the teacher made a video of sessions and used an edited version for a behavioral self-modeling program for this student. With the more inward and withdrawn students the data at week 7 showed they were more engaged, asking questions, complaining, interrupting and requesting turns. Their data from the checklist went from 90% to 85% in the last weeks. Although this looks like a reduction in requested performance these students went from compliant and withdrawn to engaged and expressing opinions and desires, and sometimes doing this by interrupting.

During early sessions, I observed students were startled to have their behaviors heard as a feeling (expression on their faces) and students calmly proceeded in activities, expressing feelings with art materials thoughtfully and sometimes with verbal comments. By week six, activities were more complex and difficult and they requested help, some with cues to do so. Some were initiating suggestions for resolving issues in scenarios, sharing materials spontaneously with each other, and, after two sessions on the "magic words" began using "please", "thank you", and raising a hand without a cue or prompt to do so and without grabbing! They came to this in their own time. Three in each group were taking a Pause ABC with only a cue by week five and one in each group initiated on their own as they choose in the sessions and in their classrooms. Comments and their sensations/feeling included

“ The Pause makes my fingers go slow” as the student changed from grabbing a pile of markers to moving a hand over a pile and selecting just one. A very quiet and withdrawn student offered “ Oh, I see it in me now and I am putting in on my paper” and drew a “?” on his head and said “I am confused.” The morning group began calling themselves friends, as in friends with each other. One student, always with an aide, requested a hand puppet politely and proceeded to move the puppet to share materials with peers, participating with other students without ever hitting (a large change). All students eventually showed a caring attitude toward the puppets and suggested problem solving strategies the Puppets had “probably” used during the week between sessions to resolve issues. These suggested strategies were appropriate and often creative and enlightening.

An important outcome included students learning the Focusing skills and using them in other settings. Most reported or demonstrated a calming and settling of emotions with the Pause ABC in the sessions. Most used the body map and art materials to describe their sensations. Two students were reported by teachers as using the Pause ABC to calm themselves in classrooms. One student reported finding his materials at home and using them when he felt “lonely” and “left out.”

Two students, both seemingly compliant and withdrawn, did not change until the last three weeks when the activities became more complex, messy and uncomfortable feelings were invited. The sessions were intense. These students showed their feeling, tears came but each student was able to acknowledge the feeling, use the art materials to acknowledge inner sensations/feelings, a Pause ABC and then rejoin the activity. Their artwork changed from showing the same “happy face” to faces with a range of emotions and “something” on their body map in their torso, sometimes solid and black

and burning. Exploring challenging behaviors and participation in complex activities exposed them to” trying something new” and risking making a “mistake”. This trying and being ok with making a mistake and “regulating” their resistance were target behaviors from teachers for these students. In addition, the other students joined in support with the pause ABC along with these two students on numerous occasions, without a cue to do so, and remained calm and attentive as the students acknowledged their emotions and tears and calmed.

The responses of the teachers and counselor confirm the student outcomes were observed and valued.

My Progress

I became more at ease with behavioral challenges arising and with meeting them in a state of Presence. I became adept at noticing when one or two students were about to “lose it” and changing an activity to engage them or suggest a group Pause ABC. I evolved into a more spontaneous, creative teacher, incorporating disruptions within the activity learning focus.

I feel my acceptance of insights gained from my Focusing sessions were possibly the most important outcomes for me. I realized how interesting and helpful my inner sensations were and began to meet them with ease both during the sessions with the students, in my dreams and daydreams, and in my daily life. Initially I was cautious about sharing my reflections. I felt they might appear weird or at least odd. Reflecting on this, I recalled classroom situations and discussions, decades in the past, with my teaching colleagues in public schools. We often recalled students and teaching situations haunting our dreams and daydreams and expressed how exhausted we felt from them! A few times stood out. In one, a decade ago and before I knew Focusing, I recalled reconstructing teaching strategies by slowing down the movies, dreams or daydreams

and watching with interest versus irritation. One result was an insight in better placement of materials for a student who used only peripheral vision. I also recall my irritation with the movies was so intense then that I could no longer ignore them and that it was the intense irritation that drew my attention and a new attitude toward them. I realized I had forgotten these past events. My hesitation in sharing insightful reflections from this project dissipated with these recollections. I sense a deeper self-confidence in my Focusing process and with myself. Focusing is a natural process. I was just not yet comfortable with all my sensations in all situations.

I was invited back to the school for the following year and I accepted. I felt this was a positive statement of progress in the students, in the Focusing sessions, and in my capacities. I thank all the teachers and students for the past and future opportunities and look forward to the next year.

References

Baumgart, D. 2015. "*Focusing scenarios and skits for focusing in groups with kindergarten students in an elementary school*"
Unpublished manuscript available from the author.

Baumgart, D., Johnson, J., & Helmstetter, E. (1990). *Augmentative and alternative communication systems for persons with moderate and severe disabilities*. Brookes Publishing Company.

Bowers, L. (2008). Gene Gendlin's gift for children. *FOLIO*, 278.

Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2008). *Trauma-proofing your kids: A parents' guide for instilling confidence, joy and resilience*. North Atlantic Books.

Rappaport, L. (2009). *Focusing-oriented art therapy. Accessing the body's wisdom and creative intelligence. Jessica Kingsley, Publisher.*

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, cognition and personality*, 9(3), 185-211.

Skills for social and academic success n.d. "Committee for children: second step", Committee for Children non profit. Seattle, Wa. www.cfchildren.org.

Stapert, M., & Verliefde, E. (2008). *Focusing with children: The art of communicating with children at school and at home. Pccs Books.*

Veugelers, R. "Being seriously playful with Rene Veugelers, <http://2012.UTUBE.com/watch?v=SjFXedd-dd8>.

Veugelers, R., "Body Map" handout from Children focusing: Exploring our felt senses. Focusing Summer Institute, 2014, Garrison, NY.

Weiser Cornell, A. (1996). *The power of focusing. Oakland, California: New Harbinger.*

WOW-Earth Bell. World Beat, 1994, 160 Belmont Ave., Garfield, NJ 07026.

Published on <http://www.focusing.org/> April 26, 2016