POTPOURRI

PART 2

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THE FOLIO

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The International Focusing Institute
15 North Mill Street (Suite 210)
Nyack, N.Y. 10960
USA

Phone: (845) 480-5111
Fax: (845) 704-0461
Email: info@focusing.org
Website: http://www.focusing.org

EDITORS
Bala Jaison, Ph.D.
Toronto, On. Canada
balaj@sympatico.ca

Paula Nowick, Ed.D.
Springfield, Ma. USA
paulanowick@gmail.com

LAYOUT AND PRODUCTION
Carolyn Kasper
Marlboro, Vt. USA
carolyn1kasper@gmail.com

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The eclectic mixture of articles in this 2016 Folio edition of the Potpourri, Part 2 attests, once again, to the amazing versatility of our treasured practice of Focusing. Our writers for this special collection reflect the wide-ranging expertise within our community and their enthusiastic sharing of their experiences with you. We hope you will thoroughly enjoy and learn from these thirteen spirited contributions.

Our first article by Jack Blackburn explores the healing potential of touch and Focusing with clients who’ve suffered from severe trauma, losing sensation in parts of their bodies. He presents three case studies detailing the application of certain proprioceptive interactions that enabled the clients to bring consciousness into their paralyzed tissue. As clients became more articulate with their somatic awareness, they became more articulate with words, and hence were able to participate directly with their felt-senses.

As befits a Potpourri the next article offers an entirely different application of Focusing: dreams. Trees Cuijpers-Kessels will intrigue you with her story of three mysterious, seemingly unconnected dreams that eventually unlock the powerful grip that childhood experiences have had on her life. Only after attending a workshop on Focusing and Dreams was Trees able to weave the many strands in the dreams into a sense of wholeness.

Entrepreneurship, mission statements, business plans, and collaborative leadership took a dramatically more powerful elaboration as three businesswomen applied the insights from Focusing and Thinking at the Edge in the first stages of their cutting-edge philanthropic enterprise in Africa. Barbara Dickinson and Margaret Herrick take us on a behind the scenes look at a new type of business model developed from working at multiple edges.

The crucial role that the right brain hemisphere plays in attunement, resonance, and regulation is central to our Focusing ability to attend inwardly and to stay present with others, writes Annmarie Early. Her extensive review of the emerging findings from neuroscience, as well as her exercises to enhance our subtle energies, is designed to expand our experiences of the living felt sense of aliveness, as we feel our way forward through new pathways.

Dawn Flynn’s article on Focusing and naturopathic medicine plumbs the profound meanings of health and disease from the perspective that no single part can be understood except in its relationship to a whole complex pattern of the body in a fluid interaction with its environment. She describes the many ways her practice tries to align and connect us with ourselves, each other, nature, and all of life.

As the director of an urban outpatient mental health clinic, Charles Herr writes of his efforts to ameliorate the high stress levels of his staff by incorporating Focusing into their daily interactions, and his eventual creation of ‘Reflective Practices’ which included Focusing along with Non Violent Communication and other meditative practices, such as mindfulness. He describes his continuing goal to seek ways to enhance the quality of living for each person in the organization and the people that organization serves.

Bala Jaison looks back on an article she wrote over twenty years ago and rethinks the implications of the sometimes intense bonds that are forged when one begins following
a path of spiritual-awareness and self-reflection. Her article explores a particular aspect of attraction to other people for which we don’t currently have a term-of-expression in our present culture. She proposes some possibilities for creating some new ways to address how we cope with and manage this enormous outflow of energy.

Yet another potpourri! Robin Kappy shares with us her delightful quick pencil sketches of some New York City subway riders drawn from her wordless felt sense of their presence as they ride together “Between Stops.”

Five Spanish Focusing-oriented psychologists, headed by Luis Lopez González, undertook a quantitative study to discover whether adolescents have the ability to comfortably work in a Focusing way while completing a sequence of six drawings of their felt-sense. Their study also sought to find out if the sequenced-drawing-exercise aided adolescents to be in a more direct contact with their body. Read about their positive findings.

Eric Lorup and Bruce Nayowith describe for us a radical exploration of what might happen when a small group of Focusers gather together to create a field of attentive listening for the Earth. The group has been expanding the traditional Focusing process by sensing into something outside of their physical bodies that is larger than any of them, and then group-felt-sensing as each listens to one another and the planet in a “co-sensing and co-resonating” process.

Practicing psychotherapist Salvadore Moreno Lopez reflects on his best practices in helping clients cope with life's stresses which have left many feeling powerless to reduce its negative consequences. He describes how he has found that taking time to PAUSE to pay attention from the bodily felt sense greatly helps people find better alternatives for living.

The next article introduces an entirely different flavor of potpourri: a thank you letter written by Steve Moscovitch to his Felt Sense. He begins his witty and poignant note with “The contribution that you have made to what is good in my life, and to what I have done with the events and situations that I wish had never happened to me, has been huge. That’s close to what brings my tears now.” You'll want to read on.

If you’ve ever wondered what life would be like if you consciously lived the Process Model, read the engrossing travel narrative written by Anna Willman. Fulfilling a “bucket-list” dream to walk across the United States, Anna shows us that she’s not just a person on a linear quest, walking from one point on a map to another, but rather, “I am in a process. I am myself processing.”

So, we are delighted to present here the 2nd edition of the Potpourri. We hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we’ve enjoyed editing it. Welcome to Part 2 of the Potpourri!

With warm regards from your Editors,

Bala Jaison, Ph.D.  Paula Nowick, Ed.D.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Guest Editors: As usual, many of our writers worked with a Guest Editor for a number of reasons: to get an objective view of their writing, to help clarify any ambiguities, to suggest ways to make the articles read more smoothly, and, of course, to point out any errors in spelling, punctuation, or English grammar. Their time and effort is a huge support both to our writers and to us because it greatly eases our editing work.

So for this edition we would like to acknowledge and offer our heartfelt thanks to: Kevin Krycka, Herb Schroeder, Bruce Nayowith, Jocelyn Kahn, Julia Whitmore and Valerie Willman.

Layout and Design: Carolyn Kasper has worked on the Folio as our talented designer/typesetter since 1999, but this edition marks the seventh year that we (Bala, Paula, and Carolyn) have been working together as a team. And for these seven years, we have been astounded (and overjoyed) by the way she manages to take the simple Word documents that we send to her and transform them into the professional-looking format that is our Folio.

So, Thank you Carolyn, for seven years of beautiful and skillful work, and for seven years of a wonderful connection together — you’ve done it again!

Cover Art: We sent out a request for ideas for the 2016 Part 2 Potpourri, and when we saw Kathy McGuire’s photograph of fall leaves and the vast array of fall colors, we were immediately reminded of the diversity and colorful ‘spirit’ of our Focusing community.

Our articles seem like Kathy’s assortment of leaves — each unique, beautiful, and inspiring — but together, a potpourri of delights. Thank you Kathy for sharing your photographic artistry with all of us and illustrating how a composite of different shapes, colors and textures contributes to the richness of life and Focusing.

Also a note of thanks to Shay Nowick, who has done cover-art for us in the past, for putting the final touches on Kathy’s wonderful photograph.

Technical Support: We can edit a Folio, and make all sorts of clever changes, but to get the docs from our computers out to you as a professional journal — and now a Kindle version, as well! — requires knowledge and technical expertise that we could not manage without the skill of our techie-savvy Webmaster, Bill Silverman. Thank you again, Bill, for setting up our site and making it easy for our members to buy the Folio in both print, and now in digital form on Kindle.

The International Focusing Institute: Once again we want to express our heartfelt thanks to the International Focusing Institute for their ongoing organizational and financial support in the publication of the Folio. We send our profound appreciation and gratitude to our Director, Catherine Torpey, for her ongoing support, sense of humor, and genuine encouragement in the work that we do. Thank you Catherine — and more thanks to Elizabeth Cantor and Rita Kirsch who keep-it-all-together in the office and are always there, for us and for our members.
Thomas Hanna, philosopher and protégé of Moshe Feldenkrais, is the originator of the concept of Somatics, which has been incorporated into hands-on therapy as well as the verbal interactive therapies. He used a concept called “Sensory Motor Amnesia” to refer to the lost abilities to articulate physically because the client has lost the ability to feel into certain parts of his/her body. In my work with touch and verbal interaction I have found that what we call a lack of felt-sense in Focusing is directly related to the absence of somatic awareness in the body. We can approach this lack of awareness from two directions: We can work verbally with the client, using the steps of Focusing while not touching the client’s body. Or we can ask the client to notice which parts of the body does he or she notices are triggered as he/she works on a particular issue. We can then ask if it is OK to bring our hands or the client’s hands into contact with those parts of the body.

The next steps would involve drawing the client into more somatic (“I am aware that I am feeling that part and touching or being touched in that part of my body”) awareness. We can then have the client notice any physical sensations that he/she is aware of and report those to the practitioner. Next, we determine if she/he can discern those physical sensations. If not, we can start to have the client use proprioceptive tools to interact with the hands: for example, “Breathe into both hands, filling those hands with your in-breath, emptying those hands with the out-breath; now just breathe into one hand, then switch.” Then the client or the practitioner can report what the hands and body feel in response. There are whole lists of proprioceptive interactions that involve the mind of the client directly in bringing consciousness into that part of the body and increasing the client’s felt-sense to the fore. These interactions involve both the touch receptors on the surface and inside of the body (interoception). As the client becomes more articulate with his/her somatic awareness, she/he becomes more articulate with words, and hence able to participate directly with felt-sense.

What is amazing in this process is that the companion or practitioner, as it were, can actually feel the contact of the client’s proprioceptive interactions as well as the client’s growing ability with felt-sense and verbal description. Just as we mirror the client’s words in Focusing, we can also in-parallel, mirror the client’s somatic interactions with our hands and our words! We can affirm that we can feel the client’s direct engagement with our hands (or their own) because there is a warming and softening of the tissue as well as a flow of energy back and forth. Also amazing, is that as the client approaches insight or a felt-shift, both we (the practitioners) and the client can feel that change in tissue and perception approaching. We can feel it because the tissue in the body is accompanying the mental and physical changes.

This approach incorporates some of Hanna’s interactive steps that he would take with clients to revive their feeling awareness as well as their growing ability to relieve their
physical limitations and their “somatic amnesia”. What is different in this approach is that
the client becomes more of an equal participant, both in feeling and interacting with his/her
body. And by using proprioceptive sensing, the client is directly using his/her mind to feel
with proprioception, rather than being mentally absorbed by a preconceived agenda.

For purposes of this article I will be using data from work with three clients, all of
whom are dealing with paralysis of their lower body caused by spinal cord injuries. Each
of the clients is different in respect to how much pain they feel, how much they can move
parts of their lower bodies, the kind of treatment they have received, and their prognosis for
recovery of motor function. Hanna believed that as sensory awareness is restored, motor
function would follow. So far the results we are experiencing with those clients support
Hanna’s hypothesis. Even if the combination of Focusing and touch only changes the client’s
sense of direct interaction with paralyzed tissue, this would be a huge step forward away
from using pain medication and TENS units to scramble pain messages.

Some examples:

Keiji is a 52-year-old male, who suffered a spinal injury at 16 years old when he fell
out of a tree. His T12-S-1 was fractured and his left hip was crushed. He gradually taught
himself to walk with crutches on fully inverted ankles. Keiji cannot use his motor nerves,
but he has interoceptive awareness through his sensory nerves. And he has learned to use
his sensory nerves to interact with my hands. For instance, he can breathe into any place in
his lower body and create an interaction with my hands and those of my students. He can
kick both of his legs, and he can move his feet in any direction. If I touch the tip of one of
his toes, he can flick my finger with his toe. I taught his wife to work with him in a variety
of ways. He has learned to reduce or eliminate pain by using interactive breathing into the
pain, a pain-relief process that can be used by each of the other clients.

When I first worked with Keiji, he was sitting in a wheel chair with his feet — seem-
ingly dead appendices — curled under his ankles and useless for supporting his body. I
discovered that even though he could not move his feet or his legs, he had feeling awareness
in each joint if I compressed his whole leg towards his hips. Also, if I tapped the surface
of his tissue anywhere on his legs, he could feel the effects of the tapping. The next test was
whether he could touch my hands through the surface of his legs no matter where I put my
hands. Much to my surprise I could feel him touch my hands. But what was I feeling? His
wife then touched the back of his head, and he could touch her fingers from inside of his
body simply by bringing his felt sense to the surface and affecting a sense of touch. There
are many other types of interactions that we have discovered along the way which could be
replicated by the other paralytics.

Keiji Testimony: By taking sessions and bringing in my own awareness, the balance
of my body has been changing. Since I have paralysis in my limbs, I have often hurt my
neck and back due to using too much strength in those areas in order to support and move
my body.

With Jack’s method and following his suggestions, I don’t need to hurt my body and
I feel my overall balance, and the movement and feelings in my legs are changing, although
little by little. Even though I can’t move my body very well, I am able to continue bringing my awareness into my body without burden and very little pain.

With appreciation, thank you very much,

Keiji Y.

Keiji’s wife Noriko: I can feel his body become soft as he brings his awareness into my hands. For instance, even when my touch is very subtle in the area of his ankles to his toes, his tissues soften as he brings his awareness gently into my touch. In general, the same softness occurs when I touch other parts of his body.

From my experiences, although he needs some external tactile stimulation in order to feel, I can sense that it is he himself who is softening his body. Bringing in his own awareness has given us a feeling of ‘freedom’, in which we can do whatever we like to do without anyone else’s help. So, this work has been very powerful for him.

The method of bringing comfortableness where there was pain can be continued (self-practice) and will grow more wellness in body and mind.

Thank you, very much appreciation to both of you,

Noriko Y.

Takako is a 70-year old female whose spinal cord was severed by a bullet 24 years ago. I first saw her because she was experiencing tremendous pain in her upper legs. First, I tested to see if her pain was reduced if I decompressed the muscles of her upper legs by compressing the fibers towards her pelvis. She had been maintaining a half lotus position with her legs propped on a wheel chair seat each day for long periods of time. Since the leg muscles were not moving, I figured that not only were they atrophying, but they were also getting very poor circulation. When I shortened her upper thigh muscles, she felt immediate relief. I then taught her to breathe into her pain at the same time as she compressed her patellas towards her hip joints on each leg. She was able to create her own relief. Next we worked with her feeling awareness in her joints by compressing into her ankles, knees, hips, and low back. In each place she was able to feel those compressions and interact proprioceptively with my hands. Finally, with the new-found sense of feeling in her legs, she could sit on the table and swing her legs and kick my hands hard wherever I placed them. None of this was supposed to happen.

Takeko first session feedback: I felt at ease right from the beginning of the session, and I was surprised that I could move my knee-caps and touch my painful thigh area without much pain at all. Also, deep breathing in and out in that area, and in my chest area, made me feel really good.

Honestly speaking, I didn’t feel that I understood very well what you did with the tablework, or your explanation for why my pain went away. So, I asked Darcy to come to my house to help me go over what you did in my first session. I tried to practice on my own, but I wasn’t so successful. I am requesting to see you, if possible for more sessions.

Darcy, Takeko’s helper: Before Takeko came for the sessions, she was suffering acutely from pain and spasm in her upper thigh muscles. She had been on heavy pain
medicine, which was injurious to her health. She experienced little or no movement in her legs and was wheelchair bound. Through Jack’s sessions, she became aware that she could actually stimulate movement in her lower legs and ankles on her own, by massaging her upper thigh spasms, lengthening the muscle fibers, and giving the muscle tissue new blood flow. This technique appeared to reduce cramping and spasms, and was useful at night while sleeping, when the pain and spasms could be more acute. She consequently developed, based on Jack’s input, her own set of movement exercises, becoming more confident in actually moving muscles in her legs.

Tim, a 67-year old male, fell off of a roof almost a year ago. I saw him in the hospital, and I tested each of his legs by compressing the soles of each of his feet towards his hip joints and low back. He could feel the compression in his ankle, knee, and hip on the left leg, but only in the hip joint in the right leg. In each place he could feel my hands as I asked him to breathe into my hands. He got more and more proficient with this practice after he returned home from the hospital. He also was able to enter any place of pain by describing to himself what the pain felt like. He was able to create a somatic interaction with the pain using his breath and awareness. As I was working with Tim, he was also getting some physical therapy in which the PT was trying to get him to strengthen the muscles where he had some feeling awareness, but because he had almost no motor nerve function, he would become very frustrated. But eventually, as he has kept on using his ability to feel into and interact with the sensory nerves, he has started to develop motor nerve function using his sensory nerves. Hanna believed that, because the motor nerves and sensory nerves are so closely wired together, they could serve complimentary functions. My experience with Tim and the other two clients confirmed that there certainly could be some truth to that proclamation.

Tim Testimony: This is my experience with presencing and Jack Blackburn. Jack possesses a unique sensitivity and approach that has guided me as follows:

For many months Jack has been helping me gain back feeling-awareness from a bruised spinal cord and crushed vertebra. After my fall from a rooftop I was paralyzed from the waist down.

I was very impressed that after only 3 of Jack’s sessions I had feeling awareness and movement in those areas damaged by the accident. This ability remains true for me even though my spinal cord linkage is still non-functioning in those body parts. By becoming present I can feel that more and more new signals are getting through.

In my opinion Jack is pioneering groundbreaking research. The results are an increased range of motion, better circulation, and reduction of edema. What is amazing is the restoration of feeling awareness, even in areas of my body where feeling was absent for many years. My overall mood is elevated since I am able to use these techniques by myself. I am healing myself with Jack Blackburn’s unique help.

In gratitude to Jack, sincerely,

Tim F.
From a Focusing perspective what is going on here? First, all three clients were able to direct their awareness into different parts of their bodies and create proprioceptive interactions with the sensory patterns they are feeling. Prior to being able to use their sensory awareness to interact with their own felt sense, they each were feeling overwhelmed by pain and emotions of hopelessness and despair, which was also affecting their primary relationships in two cases. When they learned how to come into their sensory patterns and experienced how those interactions relieved their discomforts, each felt a greater sense of enthusiasm and curiosity to pursue these new approaches in their lives. The partners and friends of all three learned to duplicate many of the hands-on approaches I had developed with them. All of those approaches involved somatic interactions with bodily sensations and their own or practitioner’s hands, resulting in greater and greater control over their movement ability as well as urogenital and bowel control. Pain has become a presencing signal allowing more access into a doorway of parasympathetic confirmation (relaxation response) rather than sympathetic withdrawal (fear response). This is a very profound shift that has large implications for everyone suffering pain, as the pain signal itself seems to be the key.

In Focusing it has been established that clients can use their felt body awareness in order to connect with various issues, be they physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, that may be arising in their lives. Because they are able to develop a feeling sense and affirm a linkage to a particular issue, they can process an issue while paying attention to their bodily reactions, a process which seems to provide a forward motion. These interactions between issues and bodily response can produce a confirming felt sense in awareness that leads to better clarity, a better understanding, a better direction, a new insight. In traditional Focusing one does not use touch in order to establish a link to the body experience. This traditional approach may establish a useful vagueness in which the Focuser is sorting through various possibilities of issues and feelings to approach. The addition of touch whether by oneself or a practitioner makes the Focusing process more perceptible.

One way of proceeding with this approach is when the Focuser is able to locate the part of his or her body that is sensorially triggered by the issue at hand and then using touch, whether it’s the client’s hands or the practitioner’s, to create another channel of sensation that can parallel the felt sense forming. As one who has been trained to use touch in my work with clients, one thing that amazes me is how I can feel whether clients are really bringing in their conscious awareness somatically. What am I feeling and how is it being communicated through the bodily tissue, mine and the clients? The early researchers in Focusing found that their successful clients were checking in with their bodily feelings before arriving at an answer or conclusion. So in the example of paralytic clients above, one thing that is quite unique is the lack of feeling awareness in the lower parts of their bodies — and yet — the same tools that have allowed me to feel the degree of a client’s conscious awareness were available with each of these persons and enabled each of them to control muscle spasming, create pain relief, attain increased movement, obtain a direct sense of participation in their sessions, and achieve a growing sense of active participation in their lives.

So here are a few facts that may help us relate Focusing to these outcomes. First is the fact that the bodily sensorium is accompanying everything that happens in our lives whether we are awake or asleep. That sensorium is what can give us feelings of aliveness
and participation in every moment. Another fact about the body is that it only exists in the present moment. Every sensation in the body, whether it is accompanying an action that clearly is happening now or a memory or story of past experiences, is also happening now. All sensations that are bodily generated are anchored in each now-moment. If we train our minds to pay attention to those bodily sensations as they occur, we are learning to experience what I call body NOW presencing. This is exactly what is happening between Focuser and practitioner when they are interacting with one another through their bodily senses.

Another factor, which may be playing a larger role than we know at this point, is the emerging theory that connective tissue in the body is a vast communication system which is faster, more dependable, and much more attuned to consciousness then our brain-neural forms of communication. These new studies may be proving that we have only scratched the surface of what we call consciousness. One example of what I am talking about is the recent films of ever-active fascia in living tissue. These fibrous webs form a vast, ever-changing latticework, which weave together every cell in the body in such complexity that we are totally baffled by its ever-present state of change and adaptation. Many researchers are now speculating that this latticework is responsible for the many complex mixtures of thoughts, feelings, and awarenesses, which we commonly call proprioception, instinct, intuition, or anticipation.

Contrary to any expectations I had when I started to work with paraplegics, there seems to be no barrier to growing parallel function and deepening bodily awareness. And as surprising perhaps is the fact that these changes can be perceived and participated in from both directions, as client and practitioner, who are both able to share a state of shared presence.

I believe that by bringing touch, which is our most powerful sense, both inside our bodies (a new form of self-Focusing) and the surface of our bodies, and combining touch with proprioception and palpation and body NOW presencing awareness, we can enter a whole new realm of implication and self-discovery.

And the body, the lowly body, is providing our access to a wholly different form of conscious communication and joint participation with everything alive, what the Buddhists call *sentience* or *beingness*. I believe that no matter what issue we are dealing with, there is always sensory accompaniment in the body unless we are anesthetized. Once we are able to locate the sensory accompaniment, we can learn to use body NOW presencing to interact with those sensations. We are then entering a state of awareness that allows us to access that which is implicit in the moment. Another way of putting it is that in presence, the body is also involved in processing the issue. And both persons, client and practitioner, can feel it happening, and both are being affected. Each of these clients could also process by themselves when they would bring their touch into the area in question. By so doing they were able to create a presencing interaction between their inner awareness; proprioception and their outer awareness; palpation.

**Acknowledgments:** I want to thank Kevin Krycka for agreeing to be my Guest Editor and submitting his feedback, as well as his body for some sensory motor sessions, of the type described in this article.
**Jack Blackburn** is a Bodywork practitioner, teacher, and international presenter. He is a certified spiritual director with a Masters in Theology and Ministry, and also a Focusing teacher. He works in both the United States and Japan. Many of his articles, newsletters, and class listings can be found on his website: www.presencingsource.com and Japan website: http://www.presencingsomatics.com

Jack can be reached by email: jackpresence@gmail.com and on Skype at: jackblac
A TRIO OF DREAMS

T. M. Cuijpers-Kessels

Dreams have always played a significant role in my life, and I have always felt them to be of great importance. During my life I have worked with dreams in different ways, and finally, I have used Focusing to help me amplify my dreams. Years ago I was confronted with three very penetrating dreams. All three of them woke me up — a signal for me that they required my attention.

The first dream — November 2003 — was about my adult son as a seven-year-old child:

_I'm walking with my son in a well-known village. It's a peaceful and warm summer evening, and people are laughing and friendly, saying ‘hello’. My son however starts to become sad and nostalgic. I try to comfort him, but his distress becomes worse. Finally his clothes fall off and all at once he jumps in a ditch, with his head embedded in the mud. He — as an adult now — can't help himself out, and I can't reach him in time to help him. I'm desperate! He will die!_

I’m half awake, but not allowed to wake up before having rescued him. But still the dream eludes me, and I wake up with my stomach, chest and head feeling like a bomb full of tension and tears. I’m restless and feeling big fear. It’s early in the morning, and I can’t sleep anymore. The following day is a busy day, and the dream remains in the background, but the next morning the dream returns in its full intensity.

About a week before my dream our son told us that he did not feel well. I was worrying about him and worrying even more after my dream. The dream stayed with me during the weeks that followed. I tried to Focus on it, but at that time I didn’t yet know how to work specifically with dreams in a Focusing way. I started to realize that the dream had to do with my own life — with my ‘raison d’être’ — but I wasn’t able to satisfactorily understand why it made me feel sad. The dream itself made me feel sad and kept on causing the same physical reactions every time I thought about it. I really wasn’t able to understand the real meaning of the dream, and being busy, after awhile the dream was nearly forgotten.

Then two months later — January 2004 — I had a second dream that woke me up:

_I'm in an older house on the first floor in a spacious room - like a factory hall. At one side of that room there is a bright shower room, such as in a big public sauna. In the shower room are people, very near death or dying, hanging from_
meat hooks, as in a slaughterhouse. I’m about nine years old and sitting on a treatment table, my legs hanging down, on a mattress with a terry fitted sheet — a larger version of the kind used when dressing babies or changing their diapers.

A man who turns out to be a doctor pushes my head down on the treatment table and puts a knife to my throat. I had a momentary hope of convincing him that it’s not necessary to kill me, but it really seems to be what is about to happen! The only thing I can do is to surrender. I see the knife above the skin of my throat, and then it is inserted into my carotid artery. I don’t feel any pain; I feel slightly quiet and passive. Then my blood is gushing out, and with the blood I feel the fading of my life force. My heart gets a bash and then feels like stone. I feel the rest of my body stiffen and become powerless. I’m still huddled and with my last bit of force I stretch out on the mattress. There is no one to help me. Stretching out I see how my blood is immediately absorbed by the foam rubber mattress. The terry fitted sheet only shows some small spots that I now cover with my body. And then, after all he has already done, the doctor places a needle in my leg, and gives me an injection. To help me to die faster?

Meanwhile, in a corner of the room is the bathroom of my family home, where one of my sisters is washing my mother’s hair. Neither my mother nor my sister looks at me; they simply continue their activities. Their lack of attention pains me. I dare not tell them of my dying, what happened to me, because I know that will make them feel guilty for the rest of their lives. Finally, I ask for a small moment of their attention in the last half a minute of my life. There is no reaction, but a new visitor is arriving on the ground floor and following the doctor upstairs. As he arrives the visitor notices a small hole in the clothes and skin of the doctor’s shoulder blade, and he then knows the hole is the mark/trace of an injection. The visitor also catches a glimpse of the shower room slaughterhouse and then sees me on the treatment table. The visitor is also doctor, and understands what is happening, but the doctor who was killing me doesn’t realize the insight of the visitor — that the other doctor knows the true identity of the visitor.

Meanwhile, I notice that I am not yet dead because minutes have passed. I start to believe that the injection was intended to reduce pain or even to anaesthetize me. Maybe the visitor can save me by administering a blood transfusion or, if necessary, an antibody. There is no time to lose! But the visitor can’t do anything, because the doctor might kill him too!

Still waiting for my death. I’m surprised not to be dead yet. The bleeding has stopped and not all my blood had flowed away. I actually feel a small bit of force. At the same time I realize the impossibility of continuing to live and the reality that my life seems so unimportant!
When I wake up, I don’t even feel fearful, nasty, or pathetic. I feel passive. Yet the dream has a feeling of great importance!

This dream could hardly wait to be explored! And fortunately, I had learned how to work with dreams in a workshop I’d attended on Focusing and Dreams. In the workshop I had worked with two nightmares I’d had since the age of five — one of them a repetitive one. These nightmares already showed me the choking and constraining impact on me as a child around the rather dogmatic religion I was brought up with — and how religion had taught me to be obedient and thus scared to really listen to myself. Therefore the first link I made with this dream was the religion and religious environment in which I was brought up.

Playing the role of the ‘doctor’ in my dream (in my head) let me feel his responsibility for the ‘right behavior and mental health’ of the believers. If they were not humble and obedient, they had to be ‘treated’ because, in dogmatic systems, critical thinking, liveliness and impulsiveness are considered dangerous; the leaders need their followers to have feelings such as fear and guilt in order to keep their power.

The doctor was not aware of being — ‘injected’ by the system himself — he was relaxed and convinced of his well-doing by making or keeping people stupid and numb — and therefore good followers of the system. He worked thoroughly and fast. In spite of his conviction, however, his work had to be done secretly, alone, and in a special place!

In the shower room, freshly treated people were hanging upside down. I didn’t know if they were still alive or not, or why and how long they were hanging there. My body let me feel that they were hanging there to frighten and intimidate me. The larger version of the ‘baby-mattress’ showed the attempt to let people feel small and dependent. The room where the doctor performed the treatment looked like a factory hall where assembly line work is done.

Being the child in my dream, sitting on the treatment table, I felt relaxed, at first — I didn’t expect that anything bad was going to happen. That innocence came from being the youngest in a big family, protected and loved, living in a small village close to nature. However, while growing up, I was more and more confronted with the values and standards of the religion and the religious community. I often felt a ‘holy indignation’ about certain questions, an attitude that often wasn’t understood or tolerated. Being not understood by ‘older and wiser’ people was like being surprised by ‘the doctor’s actions’ in my dream. And there was hardly any time to realize that truth/danger, and furthermore, there was no way to escape. So my life force and the passion of my heart were removed, and I couldn’t even feel the pain of it.

There was no one to help me. My mother and that specific sister, my family’s most fearful believers in the religious system, couldn’t see, feel or understand what was going on because they had been treated, too. It was impossible for me to open their eyes and make them aware of my suffering. And now it was too late to help me. Trying to make them more aware would only embarrass them and make them feel guilty for the rest of their lives. My life felt powerless from head to toe. Hardly anything was left of me. The traces of the
treatment had also disappeared. My blood was hidden in the mattress, and the few spots on the sheet were hidden by my own body. In the end no one would ever be able to see what had really happened.

And what did the injection do? In the dream I thought that the injection would help me to die faster, but asking my body, I learned that the goal of the injection was to keep me alive. I would continue my life in numbness and powerlessness, to be a virtuous servant, an obedient carrier-forward of the system, and possibly capable of injecting other people!

The visitor in the dream represented the unexpected arrival of my husband in my life. At that time I was studying physiotherapy and searching for ‘my’ way of living and thinking. He came from a critical and anti-dogmatic family — he wasn’t ‘treated.’ He was the ‘doctor’ with the right diagnosis and injections with the ‘antibody’ for me. He couldn’t instantly help me and give me back my power, independence, and self-esteem, but he had the prudence to give me the space to work it out for myself — and let my blood and force grow. In the beginning, his points of view — his injections — were embarrassing for me, but they became more and more affirmative and supportive around what I dared to think and feel, such as the ‘holy indignation’ about destroying the ‘holy self,’ and the idea of being unimportant!

So, this second dream was about an important thread running through my life, offered to me in a well-ordered summary of insights that I gathered — partly with Focusing — over the years. Every single detail of the dream symbolized a story, making it possible to retell a larger story, briefly and to the point. And what’s more, the context also showed the unmistakable connections between the different and varied details.

After working with the second dream it was easy to understand the first one. The idyllic and romantic scene in the first dream referred to my early childhood, but also to the non-awareness of the ‘treated’ and ‘injected’ people, who were not peaceful, at all. They were not simply friendly, but caught in that friendly-looking system. How misleading! No wonder ‘my son’, a part of me, appeared in such a desperate position!

There are some examples I especially remember, showing my body’s ‘knowledge’ of what wasn’t right for me — from the beginning! There were the nightmares I had at the age of five, and later, many more dreams from about the age of seven, in which I started to fly, to make it impossible to be kept by anyone — Who? I didn’t know.

There were two times, at the age of seven, that our school class had to do exercises for the ‘first holy communion’ with the (nasty-feeling) pastor in our church. Once I vomited during the exercise, and once afterwards, at home.

At the age of eleven I was so scared of being called by God to become a nun, like my eldest sister, that I hyperventilated before I finally fell asleep. Preparing to graduate from primary school, the pastor of our church made me feel indignant by advising us to stay as we were — so as not to grow!

Now I knew what my body already knew, and my body knew that my mind knew!

And then after a couple of weeks the third dream came:
I am standing at a small distance from an older (but not old) house with larger (but not large) windows. I am outside in the darkness. The atmosphere is like one of a warm and peaceful summer night. I feel relaxed, happy and regenerated. I feel so happy I could almost cry. I am looking at that house, a house like a home. The windows have yellow-beige curtains. A soft and warm light from inside is shining through them. In some places through a small chink of the curtains I can still catch a glimpse of what is happening inside. It looks like a party where all manner of dear friends heartwarmingly celebrated something last night. They celebrated having found each other and understanding each other. They were talking together, laughing, drinking, and hugging. All those friends are still there. The house is filled up and the atmosphere is lively inside. The party is not totally finished yet. I can't really remember, but I am very sure that I joined them at the party last night. And just between dreaming and awakening the following words are coming up: 'Dreams are shifts in cellular memory'. (Cellular memory is a term used in Applied Kinesiology, my specialty, to describe memories that we are absolutely not conscious of, but which are stored very deeply, and kept safely in our bodies.)

The moment I woke up and heard the message that ‘dreams are shifts in cellular memory,’ I knew that the house in my dream was actually my body. In daily consciousness I used to call my body an instrument of my being, or the house I am living in. It was clear to me that the friends inside the house were my ‘cellular memories’ — the different details, with their very own stories, from my first two dreams. I had been with those previous dream-stories in my third dream. I did not exactly remember what happened in the house, or in my body, but looking through the small chinks of the curtains I was just able to catch a glimpse of the celebration and its atmosphere.

My body felt as though miracles happened inside during the dream — like loving hands had been up and about with certain ‘cellular memories,’ shaking them up, picking them out of the muddle, and reordering them. The different ‘cellular memories’ had found each other and were then understanding each other. They had become friends and that was what they were doing — celebrating together! They were moving around and together in a pleasant way now. There was no need for me to know how exactly things came about last night, inside my body, in my dream. However, it was important for me to know that things had changed inside, and I needed to be aware and to know how it was feeling in there, right at that moment! An extended shift had taken place, and I really had to wake up to consciously perceive this shift!

The third dream and shift could not take place before the symbolic images, and the bodily reactions belonging to the felt senses of the first two dreams, sufficiently had my attention — and in the right way. The second dream seemed to come in order to help me understand the importance and content of the first dream. The third dream came to say: “It’s understood, and all right now!”

In the weeks after the third dream the newly acquired order was still delicate. One moment there was the festive feeling from the last dream in my body, but at other moments
the old bodily feelings came back with all their violence. These feelings however no longer agitated and confused me. In the course of some weeks there gradually arose a quiet balance, a balance that felt much stronger than before the three dreams.

This story shows the different functions, impact, and importance dreams can have — and how dreams can process and arrange the many impressions released from our bodies or ‘cellular memories’. Our dreams will do the same with the many impressions that we catch daily from our environment, yet can’t give enough attention to during the day.

It was in my work as a physiotherapist, but especially as an applied kinesiologist, that I met the words ‘cellular memory’. You might say they ‘cellular memories’ are somatized, unconscious feelings, and determining our appearance and health, when kept for longer times in our bodies. ‘Cellular memories’ can be touched and activated by all kind of live events, as well as by therapy or Focusing. Sometimes unexpected feelings can cause disturbing or confusing sensations, especially if the person’s process is missing a direct and clear relationship between their long-held feelings and what is coming up in the moment.

My experience is that the process of arranging and ordering often happens without our consciousness when we deeply rest in Morpheus’ arms, but that sometimes, and probably when it concerns important questions, dreams wake us up and ask for our conscious attention. And after all my experiences with dreams, both mine and my client’s, I have not found a better way to give attention to — or to better understand dreams — than with Focusing!

Trees (Dutch for Theresa) Cuijpers-Kessels is a Dutch physiotherapist who also worked with Applied Kinesiology — a holistic system — for thirty years, and since 2001 with Focusing. She is a one-to-one Focusing Trainer and a Focusing Trainer for groups and — being retired and a grandma now — she still works part-time in both modalities.

Trees can be reached via e-mail at: treescuijpers@kpnplanet.nl. Phone: +31735993351. Website: www.treescuijpers.nl (in Dutch).
TAME:
The Evolutionary Tale of How We Came to Work at Multiple Edges

Barbara J. Dickinson, C.F.T., and Margaret (Margie) A. Herrick, C.F.T.

“Every topic and situation is more intricate than the existing concepts.”
— Gene Gendlin

Imagine a group process that provides a systematic way for individuals to bring out not-yet-articulated inner wisdom, and then merge the unique newness of their discoveries into a whole that is larger and more visionary than the sum of its parts. A description of that convergence process is what follows. Because of the experience of that convergence, the authors are committed to applying this process more broadly in business and other organizational endeavors. In this article, we share and bring this process to light for all who are attempting to create a new and better way to both form and run group endeavors in any environment. We present a method to create a shared foundation and connectivity among stakeholders that will enable forward movement, creativity and innovation.

This article is about the desire to form a new organization — to realize a vision — and the process by which the authors brought their understanding of two practices called Focusing and Thinking at the Edge (TAE) to a group in order to accomplish the goal. The cast of characters in this tale needs some introduction at this point. Margie, Sophie, and Barbara Lucas wanted to create a new kind of organization to lift girls and women out of poverty and destitution, especially in Africa where the three had worked with an organization in micro-lending. They will be referred to as the “Founders.” When the Founders ran into some organizational roadblocks, Margie invited her friend and longtime TAE and Focusing partner, Barbara Dickinson, to help facilitate the difficult process of creating an innovative organization using both TAE and Focusing. We will refer to these two women as the “Partners.”

We tell our tale about how this happened in four parts: first is the tale of how the Founders struggled to articulate their vision, which often seemed amorphous and indistinct. And then there is the tale of how Margie sensed a need for a facilitator versed in both Focusing and TAE whose expertise might just unlock some forward motion. In the third tale, we tell how this facilitator partnered with Margie, to help the Founders create their vision regarding the new kind of organization they dreamed about. And then there is the tale of the birth of the new organization.

When TAE was originally conceived, it was to be the tool of an individual academic theory creator. The practice has broadened to be applied to many topics, but this is the only instance the authors know of where TAE was applied to a group in the setting of creating a new organization. In using TAE for a group process, we explored its application to multiple
participants — a variant of the usual application of TAE. The challenge was to simultaneously tap into the intricacy of three individuals’ experiences to create and articulate a new whole. In the doing, we have created TAME — Thinking at Multiple Edges — which uses the TAE steps in a group where the Partnership aspect is “rewired” among three or four (or potentially more) members. The result is something larger than any individual member believes she could have created on her own or in a TAE Partnership.

We used Focusing and TAE and found the methods of TAE evolving as we worked in the group in such a way that it felt like a new way of using TAE to help create a new organization. Through TAE we formed “a more perfect union” of visions — a new vision creating a new organization. Along the way, both traditional Focusing and Interactive Focusing made this process richer and more effective than any of the four professionals had ever experienced before.

**A PARTNERSHIP, A SHARED VISION AND A CONVERGENCE**

Imagine three women knowing that their calling is to change the world. Although these three women shared passion and vision, they came from different backgrounds and brought different skills and resources. They were three women who trusted each other at a heart level. They believed that together they could bring a unique solution to the intractable problems rooted in abject poverty that women and girls face in developing countries. Each of them knew in their very core that they wanted to do something that would empower women and girls, and they wanted to do it in a way that had not been done before. Although they knew they could, they didn’t know how or what form it would take. In the best of times, when they were together with this shared belief, they knew that they were going to make a difference and that they had a deeper purpose than any of them had been able to articulate so far.

Now that the endeavor is a success, two of the Founders have this to say.

Barbara Lucas: “It was important to me at the outset of this effort, not only to make the world better for women and girls, but to do that as women in a way that was unique to our strengths, yet viable and sustainable in the world the way we find it. What I learned from what we did was that it is not just permissible, but advisable, to weigh decisions by their effect on your body. We all have reactions to things in our business and life that give us visceral sensations, but I don’t think we honor them. We honored them in this process and I think that, in and of itself, was the triumph of the feminine, that this was a process where we could do something tangible, organizationally sound and productive — but in a way that honored our bodies, and I think we came to a better conclusion because of it. We should remember this in our everyday lives. We will be better off.”

Sophie: “We are exactly where we should be, and when I think back to what was my own frustration in the process of things not happening faster, that does feel very masculine — this ‘do, do, do! get it done, doesn’t matter how.’ We are in a place we should be proud of, real numbers, real supporters, worthwhile right program underway.”
Other times, deep doubts surfaced:

- **Who are we to think that we could make a difference where so many others have failed?**
- **How could we do this differently when others have tried and haven’t succeeded before?**
- **Sometimes, it seemed as if We are somehow not right, as if to say, You are wrong if you are looking at it or sensing it differently.**

The Founders knew that they wanted the organization to be innovative and different, but they were unsure about how to proceed. Then Margie thought about her previous TAE Partnerships. As a TAE practitioner, she was experienced with its “magic” — its explicit purpose of bringing forth new theories that have not previously been advanced. Her knowledge of TAE gave her more than a process. It gave her the belief that “different” was doable, and that gave her the courage to proceed. She believed that the TAE process would allow the three of them to tap into something that they had not yet been able to articulate because TAE enables practitioners to bring out more than what is consciously known, making their own individual contribution to that “known + more.” That is when Margie asked her TAE partner, Barbara Dickinson, to work with her to bring forth and articulate this new vision or concept.

From here, the story of this journey follows two convergent pathways. One pathway was how the Partners used Focusing and TAE to guide a process that they were inventing. The other was how the Partners, working with the Founders, brought about a new type of organization.

The authors want to pause here to express gratitude to Dr. Eugene Gendlin’s *and* as one of his greatest gifts because that word explicitly gives us permission to think outside the box. Our creativity is often held in check by internal expectations that our ideas have to be “in the box,” but the word *and* can melt those limitations like a snowball in the August sun. Holding *and* as sacred space, they embarked on a journey tapping into group Focusing, Interactive Focusing and the TAE process in new and exciting ways.

**THE PARTNERSHIP — MARGIE SPEAKS**

Margie says, “I have been told that I am a divergent thinker with visual spatial memory. For me, this description helped make sense of all the times when my interpretation and flow would differ from those around me. When I read the description of TAE, I immediately sensed a ‘home port’ that could give me structure to better call on my natural processes.

“When Barbara Dickinson and I did a TAE process together around the vision, all this wonderful work came out about how it could be done, helping to articulate the inner wisdom. When I took that to Barbara Lucas, one of the Founders, she was so taken with our emerging ideas that she wanted to share in the process. At this point, I asked Barbara Dickinson if both of us could work with her. Barbara Dickinson explained to me her policy of always saying ‘yes’ to any request to apply Focusing or TAE in some new way, whether how it will work is
immediately obvious — or not. That was the beginning of the multiple edges, when Barbara Dickinson managed the first session with Barbara Lucas and me. This experience was so powerful that we agreed that we needed to include our third Founder, Sophie. She readily joined this new visioning exercise.”

THE PARTNERSHIP — BARBARA DICKINSON SPEAKS

Barbara Dickinson says, “I am a lifelong thinker, most frequently described as ‘thinking too much for my own good.’ Only when I learned that thinking well could be a strength did I find the way to leverage that skill with the techniques of TAE. Although Margie and I had already met in the Focusing community, it was when we shared TAE that our mutual love of this work brought us closer together and inspired her to invite me into the process of what would become the vision and actualization of the Founders’ newly formed organization named, WISE (Women in Social Enterprise). I have worked on vision statements, and this work speaks to one of my strengths called ‘futuristic.’ People who have the strength of ‘futuristic’ spend a lot of their thinking time on things that don’t exist yet. This skill is particularly useful in the construction of a vision statement. I listened to what Margie said about the intentions of the group so far and it sounded too exciting to pass up.”

THE CONVERGENCE

Barbara Dickinson facilitated meetings among the three Founders every week for over a year. This, then, was the beginning of what they would come to call TAM — Thinking at Multiple Edges. The result — creating an organization in a new way, which became WISE.

USING FOCUSING AND TAE TO MERGE THREE VISIONS

The normal mode of conversation in any gathering goes like this: A person says something. Another person says something that comes to them based on what the first person said. Maybe the first person responds. Maybe the third person adds something of her own. The conversation continues in a response/reaction mode like this unless someone consciously “pushes the pause button” and makes a different kind of effort. In normal conversation, there is little consciousness about the mode itself and how it is directing the flow of conversation. Barbara Dickinson knew intuitively that something different was needed and called on her Focusing and TAE training to inform her facilitating the group. This prompted her to do three things — to pause the conversation regularly, to sense what was going on in a way that let her pose questions for consideration, and to lead the discussion of considerations in a Focusing way.

Listen to the Founders themselves describe how this was for them:

Barbara Lucas: “We were brought together by a feeling that had not yet gelled into a vision that we were destined to do this thing, but we didn’t know what this ‘thing’ was. As we flailed around trying to figure it out, there were times when emotions stopped us. — particularly the emotion of fear. When we tried to examine why we were stuck, we got very
vivid images of fear stopping the process, and then equally vivid images of us dumping the fear, like a wheelbarrow full of everything we want to throw over the edge or cliff. The [Focusing] process brought us to a way of identifying what our bodies were telling us, enabling us to deal with it. The utility of the process was figuring out on a nonverbal level what works, what does not work, what is inhibiting us from moving forward, and what would allow us to move forward.”

Sophie: “I remember what felt like flailing at the time, but what was different for one thing, was getting quite methodical early on. We spoke every Monday. We were constantly trying to extract what this was. That is unique at the beginning of organizations — people do not allow that time and process to extract. I recall being a bit frustrated about why we were not moving faster — the feeling: we are at a standstill. Looking back, I now know we were shedding fear, shedding our own skins and working in a way quite methodically toward what we were going to do. I have never previously allowed that time and process at the forming stage of an organization. I can see how that has set me up for failure in the past.”

Barbara Dickinson now knew that she was holding something like her own vision about how this process was going to produce new results, but it was fuzzy. She used pauses to redirect when the conversation flow was heading into unproductive places, and helped the Founders take the “deep dive” into meaning that comes from TAE in order to create something shared and new.

The search for meaning at the heart of this whole effort centered on the words “different” and “innovative,” and resonated with the deep doubts expressed in the beginning. How TAE methods helped Barbara Dickinson guide the group was all about “When we say we want to be different and innovative, what does that mean to us? And how will that impact on the articulation of our vision to an audience with their own meaning for those terms?” In practical terms, she repeatedly invited the group to revisit their meaning and refine that meaning many times during the course of the creation of WISE. In so doing, the group validated both internally and externally the uniqueness of their design. TAE’s later steps include a process of testing a theory in a field other than one’s own. We adapted this step testing the uniqueness of WISE’s organizational structure and proposed operations against other organizations doing similar work.

Sometimes the Founders were going down rabbit holes, which proved to be fruitless. Sometimes they found tangents which turned out to be gold and needed attention, and that added value to the whole endeavor. One of Barbara Dickinson’s tasks was to help the group figure out which was which! What she was doing could best be described as “taking known processes — Focusing and TAE — into uncharted waters.”

For the Founders, there were times when the energy and enthusiasm for a fresh development — like an exciting new project — hampered progress toward completion of the vision and launch. Barbara Dickinson had seen something similar derail the creation of an organization in previous cases. Using pauses, she guided the group toward the creation of the vision statement by bringing the group back to their original words. This helped them stay grounded and on track toward the accomplishment of the larger goal, yet retain the enthusiasm for an important individual project.
Neither of the Partners knew at the time what the outcome would be of mixing and modifying TAE steps and Focusing in this way. Nevertheless, in the end, what came was a customized process that is a mix of the two. The Focusing element was crucial in helping the Founders tap into their individual inner wisdom so that together, they created the vision and the mission of the new organization.

Here is what came from these efforts and fueled the launch of WISE as we now know it. As might be expected, the vision statement born of this creative fluidity is an on-going process and has evolved beyond this version.

“We envision a world where women and girls not only have access to health care, education and wealth on a par with men and boys, but fully exercise equal power to make the most of those resources for their own good and the good of all. We operate on two plains, the global and the grassroots, creating a paradigm shift as a result of our work in the way that women and girls can not only survive, but thrive on equal terms with males in this world. The flexible teams we assemble, who are heartfelt in their approach, are imbued with local understanding, based in the needs of their own areas. Women everywhere, understanding it is within our power to make change, not just development professionals, create new, or strengthen existing, programs in health care, economic independence, and education for all women and girls. What we do is led by women, understanding their power to effect change beginning with global networking and collaboration.”

THINKING AT MULTIPLE EDGES — HOW WE USED THE STEPS OF TAE TO DEVELOP TAME

The how part of what we did was akin to listening to multiple participants and hearing when they are thinking at and beyond their own vagueness. With intuition and practice, the facilitator could hear the participants’ descriptions of what they were feeling and more...the fuzzy places in between knowing and visioning...and blend them into insightful questions that help participants articulate much more exactly what they want than they had ever been able to do before.

The questions she used were those of her on-going TAE practice and Focusing guiding, such as, “When you say [word] what do you want that to mean?” and “Can you pause and sense how that is in your body?” and “Let’s take a moment to go inside and see what comes.” What made her interventions insightful was the timing and her ability to take a thread from each person’s articulation, see the connections, and invite the group to share those connections. As each of the group members has subsequently said, each of them had worked alone in the past and these new results seemed much stronger and more promising to them because of the connections and bonds the process formed.

The essential elements of the TAE process informed our entire process. These included finding the crux, which is the essence of one’s individual vision; identifying key words that connect each participant to their individual meaning; elaborating instances, which are experiences informing meaning and detecting repeating life patterns from all that; and then creating what TAE calls “crossings,” which are building blocks of the vision. We did not
proceed in a straight line, starting with TAE Step 1 and ending with TAE Step 9. Rather, it was a process of holding the different spaces and allowing them to mesh. Nor did we work in a linear progression: the facilitator had to understand all the elements of Focusing and TAE, and bring them into the Founders’ inner explorations in an evolutionary way.

We know what we accomplished was remarkable, both in the process we used and in the outcome we achieved. We hope what we have recounted here is understandable, teachable and repeatable. The method we created involves one person, who is a listener/facilitator, and multiple participants. The facilitator hears each of the participants’ expressions of their individual visions and uses intuition, visioning, empathy, problem-solving, understanding connectedness and understanding of organizational development. We believe that this combination of skills exists in many people and therefore, we can teach this method for use in many applications.

FOUNDERS’ EXPERIENCE

Here is how the Founders put it.

Barbara Lucas: “We did not do the traditional thing, which is to sit and draft a business plan. We did something that enabled us to get closer to the truth of what we wanted to do. It did take time — and, at times, the process was agonizingly slow. We would get off the phone and wonder why we hadn’t concluded the initial phase of things. I think it was like gestation — the preparation for giving birth that doesn’t happen in a minute. We felt in our bodies that this thing was growing from a small seed. Now, I think we own the idea in a way that would not have happened had we had simply rushed to do a business plan and found the first project to get the process rolling. For the nature of this endeavor, that was very important — we’re not talking about another organization — we’re talking about a movement that catches fire and changes people all over the world. Would we have liked to hatch that in a minute? Sure! But that expectation would not have been realistic.”

Sophie: “Before this process, I had gone with something of a light bulb aha! moment that resonates with me, and then I created an organization from there. This time, we started to create with more of an intention to change the process. Then when we had our aha! moment, because we had the process already going forward, so the direction in which we were headed was more true to that spark. This is the first time I have worked in a way where I felt drawn to something and have been willing to put in the time to get to that moment of ‘This is it!’ I think if I have a light bulb moment again for something new, I will want to bring a process like this to that moment. I think I have created some things that are worthwhile in the past, but it seems like the end result is much more sustainable when you bring the process in the way we did.”

THE REALITY THAT CAME FROM THE FOUNDERS’ EFFORTS

The Founders believe the organization they created, Women in Social Enterprise (WISE), operates uniquely. For one thing, decision-making comes from the method that was used to form the organization, which is new. Calling on the skills and resources of
women and girls across cultures to develop community-based solutions to the obstacles and challenges facing them in developing countries is a concept that is gaining traction. The Founders hope to leverage this relatively new approach with TAME, which they now know to be a new organizational development model. Using their new skills, they are convinced they have accomplished more than they thought they could, especially in the days when progress seemed slow.

They are leveraging an existing relationship in Ghana with an NGO (Non-governmental Organization) involved in economic development so that they can address challenges facing women and girls from within communities. This model is what WISE intends to become pan-African and then global. As an example, part of WISE’s model is to be in dialogue with community members facing challenges, instead of imposing outside solutions. One of the most critical challenges to lifting populations out of poverty is the delivery of consistent quality education, especially for girls. The high school graduation rate for girls in Ghana is significantly lower than it is for boys.

In certain areas of Ghana, there are no toilets in the schools. This is in part an infrastructure issue related to availability of running water. What this means for girls after puberty is absence from school for one week a month due of the lack of sanitary privacy. When a local entrepreneur partnered with an American engineer to offer a toilet solution that solves the problem of lack of running water, WISE saw this as an opportunity to keep girls in school. By building toilets and providing the necessary privacy, girls no longer miss a week of school, hence this project shifts the needle toward empowerment through education for girls.

THE FELT SENSE OF THE FOUNDERS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THEIR VISION

Margie: “My felt sense first brought an illustration to a cover of a child’s book — a little girl looking at a mountain. It was all pretty, but not real. Then it changed and it came into focus and became real.”

Barbara Lucas: “Now, we have an organization...a vision...our first major project...supporters who have written checks. We have mobilized a group of women both here and in Ghana to take the vision to the next level. We completed two fact-finding trips, with a third trip in the offing. A group of 30 Ghanaian women will participate in an event in Ghana in October 2015. We had a reception for 50 people in NYC to introduce WISE and Challenging Heights, an organization specializing in rescuing trafficked children.”

Sophie: “In the beginning, the things we’re celebrating now all felt very sludgy — like sludgy coffee — not moving, not happening. Even little tasks felt like they would require a lot of effort. Then things started to flow, spin out and move. Suddenly, things seamlessly started to happen. Then it thinned out and became fluid, like espresso — the work, energy, life force of all three women....”

Barbara Lucas: “…like three orbs of energy coming together into one. This is something we created and are a part of — different and separate from us. It is an act of creation.”
HOW TO DO THIS WORK

We are confident what we have done in creating WISE can be repeated, and we believe TAME can be taught so that it can be used in many more settings. That will be Part 2 of our story. In order to further the work that is represented by the creation of WISE, the authors plan to design and present, in workshop form, TAME training to transform individual processes into this group process that can be applied to an assortment of endeavors. That, for them, is one of the wonders of both Focusing and TAE — there is no end to what can be done when these skill sets are brought together with innovation in mind.

GRATITUDE

The Authors wish to especially thank Nada Lou, Certifying Coordinator, for opening our eyes, minds and bodies, to the wonders inside via her TAE workshops.

Biographical Information

For more information about Margie Herrick, Barbara Lucas, Sophie Stenbeck and WISE, see http://wisewomenafrica.org/

For more about Barbara Dickinson, see https://www.linkedin.com/in/barbaradickinson, or contact her at Barbara.J.Dickinson@gmail.com.
Current neuroscience supports what the Focusing community has always known. The inner realms of the implicit are the prime movers in change — they are essential for forward movement. Eugene Gendlin (1996) was decades ahead of his time, pointing clinicians inward to the felt sense and offering ways to attend — with great respect and curiosity — to what is forming in the here and now. As a psychotherapist and professor of counseling, I have come to value Gendlin’s work with clients, in teaching and training, and in my own life. Focusing practitioners have learned to trust the power of the implicit, and they allow emergence to come in the most creative ways. The Focusing community has been a teacher for me.

In this article, I offer support from neuroscience for the importance of accessing the implicit by highlighting the crucial role of the right brain hemisphere. From this understanding, I will introduce the roles of attunement, resonance, and regulation and describe how these capacities influence our ability to attend inwardly and to stay present with others. This explanation will be followed by an introduction to experiencing subtle energy pathways, which offers new potentials for extending the felt sense beyond the boundaries of the skin through attunement to and resonance with energy and flow in order to increase regulation and to enhance our capacity to be present to others in our work.

THE ROLE OF THE RIGHT HEMISPHERE

The realm of the implicit is described in the literature in a number of different ways. It is generally referred to as ‘intuition’ and has been called procedural knowledge (Ecker, Ticic, & Hulley, 2012), bottom-up processing (Fosha et.al, 2009), embodied awareness (Fogel, 2009), limbic attunement (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2007), right hemisphere processing (McGilchrist, 2009), and nonconscious, nonverbal right brain processing (Schore, 2008). I like to refer to it as the intuitive implicit, acknowledging the importance of the implicit as distinct from what is explicit, and valuing the intuitive aspects of knowing that emerge in inspired ways when attending inwardly.

McGilchrist (2009) describes this space as the realm of the right hemisphere. The role of the right hemisphere is to scan our surroundings broadly through the non-verbal channels of our immediately experienced inner knowing. The Focusing community will recognize this description as the realm of the felt sense. The right hemisphere is distinct from the left hemisphere, which is languaged, re-presentational, ordered, categorized, and narrow. Both hemispheres are important and help us to ‘know’ in different ways. They are distinct, and each has well-defined roles.
McGilchrist (2009) argues that since the historical period of the Enlightenment in western culture, the left hemisphere has taken over the rightful role of the right hemisphere. As a consequence, we have lost access to the wise knowing of the emergent right hemisphere. One of the problems is that the right hemisphere lacks words — it is born of unformed sensations — and is not as neatly ordered as the left. Ideally, the right hemisphere scans and comes to know in unformed ways, many facets of knowledge which are then translated by the left — placing words and order on what has been sensed — with an appreciative return to the right brain for continued, open scanning in an ongoing, developing dialogue. McGilchrist mentions geniuses whose most inspired thoughts come about in this right-brain/left-brain exchange.

He argues that in modern western culture the left hemisphere has co-opted the role of the right and is unwilling to relinquish control. The result is the re-presentation of what is already formed and known, creating a self-generating feedback loop that reinforces greater constriction and narrowing. The long-term consequence, he claims, is not just with the immediate information being engaged, but also with our neurocircuitry. What we are doing and how we are living is literally re-shaping our brains.

The picture painted above is a bleak one, filled with lifeless rules and repetitive box checking, impacting all areas of lived experience, including how we work in therapy. If the story were to end here, it would be depressing. The good news is that there are fresh winds blowing — interest is increasing around the realm of the right hemisphere. Much of this research is inspired by findings from neuroscience and new research about our embodied selves in the world (Fogel, 2009). Treatments that value embodied awareness, wordless knowing, and emergent, experiential practices are increasing (Fogel, 2009; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Siegel, 2013a), and not just in psychotherapy. We are in the midst of a paradigm shift that offers support for working intentionally with felt sensing realms in all areas of our lived experience (especially clinically), and that opens up the potential of extending our felt sense beyond our skin into subtle energies that influence our wellbeing, allowing us to enhance our connection with others and the larger world.

**WITHIN: ATTUNEMENT, RESONANCE, AND REGULATION**

An important first step toward these potentials is to name the qualities of the inner realms that, when activated, impact our functioning. Three particular capacities are essential for effectively working with the implicit realm of the right hemisphere: the ability to attune, to resonate with, and to regulate. Each one impacts our awareness of the felt sense and is informed by the felt sense.

**Attunement:**

Attunement is the ability to attend to and ‘sync with’ our own inner states and those of others. Accessible and responsive caretakers do this naturally when they perceive something off — or not right — between them and their child. They then work to re-attune — make contact — often through nonverbal channels. The cycle is one of rupture and repair, a natural
unfolding rhythm, like a dance, that forms the building blocks upon which secure attachment is built (Siegel, 2013a; Tronick, 2009). Attunement requires the ability to feel both inside and between ourselves and others, picking up nuances and wordless senses of rightness. We know through minute perceptions and shifts — and emergent nonverbal cues — what is right and what is not a fit.

The ability to attune is crucial for working with the implicit. For some of us, well-developed attunement skills come naturally. For others, work is needed to learn to tune in to subtle, nonverbal cues that bubble up from within. Employing a felt sensing practice can help to increase attunement and have the consequent benefit of increasing regulation. Other possible resources to enhance attunement capacities include: identifying our capacity for social awareness and social facility as described by Daniel Goleman (2006) (http://www.danielgoleman.info/topics/social-intelligence/); increasing nonverbal face reading skills as outlined by Paul Eckman (www.paulekman.com/product-category/face-training/); and identifying our emotional styles that can each be worked with to alter set points and to change neurocircuitry as suggested by affective neuroscientist Richard Davidson (2012) in his book, The Emotional Life of your Brain. Simply being aware that the inner realms are important is a starting place for increasing attunement ability.

Resonance:

Where the ability to attune helps us to form new potentials, the ability to attune within establishes a space for resonance. Resonance is the phenomenon in which two vibrating sources match frequencies so that amplitude increases and new potentials are released (Siegel, 2013b). One way to appreciate resonance is to hear how a melody is affected by harmony. When, for example, music is mis-attuned it sounds and feels off; it is actually uncomfortable and can be experienced as painful. When, however, singers are attuned to the subtle nuances of each other’s voices, the harmony syncs in a way that allows something much more than the sum of the parts to be activated through resonance. This is the magic of the ‘something more’ in therapy. We seek attunement within, and with each other, to allow resonant potentials to emerge.

Regulation:

We now know that the capacity to regulate inner states is essential to our wellbeing and mental health (Schore & Schore, 2008). What many practitioners often do not realize is that the inner state of a person communicates many different things. When we are dysregulated within, we impact those around us, especially those with whom we work. The ability to regulate our inner state involves awareness and attention to what is showing up inside, and then working to calm (regulate) an elevated state when activated.

Attachment theory is helpful in delineating different regulatory patterns that are established during childhood based on our connections with primary caregivers. These patterns include secure and insecure forms of attachment, in which we either effectively regulate (have a safe haven and secure base), become anxious and preoccupied, or shut
down (become dismissive or avoidant) in response to caregivers not ‘being there’ (Schore & Schore, 2008, Siegel, 2013a, Tronick, 2009). These patterns form from accessibility to and responsiveness from caregivers and are open for revision across the lifespan (Siegel, 2013a). They shape our internalized state regulation and influence our ongoing capacity to regulate within ourselves and with others.

Stephen Porges’s (2009) model describes the optimal regulatory space as the ‘window of tolerance.’ He delineates the necessity of having enough activation to be on-line but not so much that a person is in the red zone of fight, flight, and freeze. In the ‘window of tolerance,’ a person can use the social engagement system both to make contact with others and to aid in regulation. Because we are wired for relationship, we use others to help us to regulate. In clinical contexts this is referred to as the ‘dyadic regulation of affect.’

When we activate the space of attunement and resonance, regulatory capacities are increased and internalized in ways that change who we are in the world. The practices we engage — such as Focusing, meditation, and mindfulness — begin to influence our regulatory patterns, enhancing overall wellbeing and increasing resonant potentials (Davidson, 2012; Ecker et.al, 2012; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009).

BEYOND

The roles of attunement, resonance, and regulation do not end at the boundary of our skin. Science is helping us to understand how our brains allow us to extend ourselves and become aware of our inherent interconnectedness. Dan Siegel (2013b) has referred to this connection as a movement from ‘me to we.’ This shift in thinking and perceiving involves a consideration of self as surroundings not just self in surroundings, where we influence and are influenced by a vast web of interconnections. Features of nature as diverse as quantum entanglement (when subatomic particles are in sync and changes in one impact the other) and epigenetics (where environmental factors such as diet, social environment, and trauma impact gene expression and are hereditable) support our consideration of the unseen world and demonstrate the reality of undreamed of possibilities. Bilocation and intercellular communication trafficking faster than the speed of light is not in the imagination of science fiction, but established research (Lipton, 2008; Sheldrake, 2012).

It is an interesting question to ask Focusing practitioners — those who have known for decades the importance of the right hemisphere and the power of the felt sense — how they might expand their practice to incorporate these new scientific realities. I will suggest a few possibilities from my own experience and study, but I realize that we are at the beginning of a new frontier.

Beyond the Seen:

Stem cell biologist Bruce Lipton (2008) states that “…all organisms including humans, communicate and read their environment by evaluating energy fields” (p.90). Various traditions use subtle energy systems in their interventions and treatments. Many wisdom and
pre-modern healing traditions trusted the communications that came from right hemisphere knowing. They valued and used subtle energy systems within and around the human body.

Over the past year, I have spent over 350 face-to-face hours learning a modality called *Integrative Energy Medicine* (Poulin, 2014). My interest was personal, professional, and pedagogical. I have been a psychotherapist, a professor, and a trainer for many years. I wanted to learn a modality that placed me back into a ‘not knowing’ state outside of my field, one where I had to perceive in new ways and test my sensibilities about the intuitive implicit. I also wanted to learn how to access the intuitive in ways that are active in my personal life, but not integrated in my professional work.

IEM uses subtle energy pathways within and surrounding the body to increase balance and flow in all systems, allowing the body to increase capacities for healing. IEM conceptualizes a 3-4 foot energy system around the human body with 4 distinct layers that can be attended to and worked with. Although a full description of the practice of IEM is beyond the scope of this paper (see WhiteWinds.com), it uses similar capacities, such as felt sensing to attune, resonate, and regulate with what one might not literally see (though many energy practitioners report seeing energy visually), but rather, can be tangibly sensed and effectively worked with (Poulin, 2014).

Gendlin (1996) states that, “Focusing is a systematic, knowing way to let something implicit open” (p. 53). I want to suggest that extending our felt sensing awareness to include subtle energies allows something implicit to open in new and different ways that can inform our personal practice and enhance our work with others. At this point I can only make suggestions and point to possible ways to extend felt sensing into the beyond, but I believe that this is the next edge for working with the powerful potentials of the implicit and the intuitive. The basic skills that I have found helpful (suggestions only) are a starting place that may help the Focusing community to take some risks in further developing an awareness of subtle energy systems.

**Exercises for Sensing Subtle Energy:**

A first step is to increase awareness of subtle energy. To sense into subtle energy, one has to make space and tune into what may not seem at first vibrantly alive. This may include reading about various energy systems such as chakras or meridians; engaging in practices like yoga, acupuncture, energy psychology/medicine or any modality that works with energy pathways; or felt sensing through subtle awareness with nature such as Feng Shui. Finding ways to begin to feel into the existence of these energies is a starting point.

Another way to begin to expand awareness is through sense experiments, in which you use the sensitivity of your hands to feel into energy that surrounds the body. You can do this by placing the palms of your hands a few inches apart and sensing the tension and release when the hands almost make contact but do not actually touch. A dyad exercise that can be helpful is to have another person walk towards you and sense what it feels like when they get closer. Notice your inner felt sense of the space surrounding your body. Place your hand up to stop the person walking when you sense their presence. Have them take one step
toward you, sense again, and then have them take one step back. As you pay attention to your inner felt sense, extend out to the space around the body and sense into how what is outside impacts your felt sense within.

Another exercise is to stand with a partner and intentionally extend your energy out into their field and then bring it back into your bubble by drawing an imaginary circle around you. (You do this through intention, as will be explained in more detail in the following section). Have one person do this at a time and then switch. Talk together about what you are noticing as the exercise unfolds, working to notice contact and space (Poulin, 2014).

With each exercise and practice, take note of your attunement to sensations, felt senses, and the extended awareness of your body sensations, and of what is communicated from the space beyond. Just beginning to play with the space surrounding the body will increase awareness and the ability to simply attune.

**Subtle Attunement:**

A second step involves attunement and receptivity to subtle energy. In my training, I was taught to activate a readied state for receptivity through centering. We were taught to enter what was called our *sacred circle,* which is the energy bubble that surrounds our human body. The process is to imagine drawing a circle around the self on the ground — as if with a piece of chalk — in an intentional act of calling one’s energy back in to their circle (Poulin, 2014). I have used this exercise in my training of clinicians, having them listen before doing the process, and then listening again afterwards. In various contexts, people feel more centered and able to be present when they are within their own energy sphere, heightening their listening and attunement. There may be other reasons for increased listening capacity, including enhanced regulation, but the benefit of this exercise is nonetheless an increase in attunement and resonance.

Another practice developed by Poulin (2014), is referred to as Kenosis from the Greek word for ‘emptied’ and is helpful as a preparation for sensing into the beyond. The process is to imagine drawing a circle around the self on the ground — as if with a piece of chalk — in an intentional act of calling one’s energy back in to their circle (Poulin, 2014). I have used this exercise in my training of clinicians, having them listen before doing the process, and then listening again afterwards. In various contexts, people feel more centered and able to be present when they are within their own energy sphere, heightening their listening and attunement. There may be other reasons for increased listening capacity, including enhanced regulation, but the benefit of this exercise is nonetheless an increase in attunement and resonance.

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Whole System Sensing:

Recently, a significant life event allowed me to practice extending my felt sense into the beyond. This event, at first, felt like a punch to the gut, taking my breath away. It took me the first 24 hours to adjust as I intentionally worked to regulate, stay centered in my sacred circle, and actively keep my mind from the “now what?” questions pressing in. Once my
body had adjusted, I began to felt-sense my way forward. I used Kenosis, my felt sensing practice of attending and attuning, and then began to include my sense perception of flow and balance in and around me.

Upon awakening the third morning, I felt alert to the anxiety just below the surface and my mind began to race. I chose in that moment to felt-sense inwardly and to intentionally extend my sensing out, practicing my newly learned skills for attending to subtle energy paired with some protocols for restoring balance and flow where there are blockages. As I engaged this emergent conversation, I could feel literal places of stuckness within and around me, and as balance was restored, I began to feel a greater connection to myself and also to the sacred. My presencing became more alive and alert, allowing me to scan more openly and broadly, and to open myself up into the fullness of the experience (which included pain). Slowly my body released and began to flow.

From this place, I began to experience sensations of moving energy — which come in particular ways for me — and from that I was able to sense an alive edge. The only way I can describe my edge-sensing in that moment was that the implicit and explicit met within me and then encountered another edge in the space surrounding me. I might go so far as to say that this edge extended out to my connection with what I call spirit. I could feel the movement pair itself with words as my right hemisphere became languaged by the left, and I could see — or better yet feel, like breadcrumbs along the path — my next step forward.

The situation will take months and possibly years to fully unfold, but that moment of encounter and sensing with my whole system opened a path forward to address what had happened to me. It also gave me a new way of sensing myself and what I most truly want. Extending my felt sense beyond my body increased my internal regulation — restoring balance and flow as well as inner calm — and from that moment of attunement came forth the resonance for new potentials.

CREATING MOMENTS OF MEETING

Extending our awareness beyond the boundaries of our skin opens potentials not only for increased awareness of subtle energy pathways, but an enhancement in our ability to attune and resonate with others. As I have learned to felt-sense more holistically, I have become better able to attune more “fully” or “openly” (I’m not even sure what the words are yet), to those with whom I work. My capacity to tolerate not-knowing has increased (regulation), as has my expectation for the possibility of radical shifts when I stay attuned within and around. The greater my capacity to feel deeply within, and sense the space around my body, the greater are my regulatory abilities and attunement with others.

Dan Stern (2004) referred to the alive, intersubjective space of attuned resonance as *moments of meeting*, in which chronos time drops away, and we enter the timeless space of kairos, where something alive is allowed in our midst. I have referred to this space as *edge sensing*, where the edge within (implicit and explicit) makes contact in the dyadic space of encounter between people (Glanzer & Early, 2012). I now believe that this edge extends to the space that surrounds the body. These contact moments are the edge — the place of meeting
— in both seen and unseen ways. The Focusing community has practitioners who specialize in listening into the alive edge. I believe that this emergent realm opens new potentials that will enhance our intuitive, implicit awareness in all areas of experience.

One exercise for exploration of the edge where unseen energy communicates makes use of dyadic attunement. This unseen energy can be explored in many ways, but one practice is to sit and Focus with a partner going in and out of attunement. Have the person Focusing close their eyes, while the one listening stays present and attuned with intentional focus on the person felt-sensing — holding space or presencing. At some point, the listener will intentionally shift out of here-and-now presencing — beginning to think about something else, looking away, or moving into their head — and the person felt-sensing can check their sense perception of whether they know when and whether they are being attuned to or not. What is being felt-for is the aliveness of attunement and the perceptible absence when the listener is not attuned, and how the focuser senses that. This exercise will help affirm what you know, help you practice becoming more attuned to others, and it might just help you open up to the possibilities of the subtle energies that communicate in powerful ways — though often out of awareness.

RETURN

I do not believe any of what I have written is new; it is actually a reclaiming of an ancient practice and an affirmation of Gendlin’s pioneering work. I do believe, however, that the more these concepts can be connected to current science, the more persuasive they will become to a wider audience who may be just waking up to the realm of the implicit. The more we can describe the underlying phenomena active in right-hemisphere-processing, pointing to both theory and practice, the more creative and translatable our interventions will become. And, the more we understand about ourselves as whole system beings — within, between, and beyond — the further we will place ourselves on the edge of science, the edge of transformation, and the edge of what is yet to come.

As we embody the subtle level of our experience with an eye toward what is seen and what is yet unseen, we affirm the ‘not knowing’ space of the emergent here and now. In this process, we become the living, felt sense of aliveness, feeling our way forward into undreamed of new realms and a myriad of potential pathways forward.

REFERENCES


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Annmarie Early, Ph.D., LMFT is a professor in the Master of Arts in Counseling program at Eastern Mennonite University. Her clinical and research interests include work with implicit processes and the use of experiential, embodied treatment approaches to facilitate healing. She is certified as an Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy Trainer and Supervisor and has extensive experience applying attachment theory to clinical practice. She is certified in Integrative Energy Medicine — a modality that works with subtle energy systems — and she is currently exploring native healing practices and the intuitive implicit. Contact: aearly@me.com Phone: (540) 432-4213.
I am sitting in pathology class taking notes in my second year of naturopathic medical school. As I look at the outline of the list of diseases we are to go over today, their origin, their prognosis, the destructive and sometimes deadly effects they can have on the body, I see spinal meningitis on the list.

My heart speeds up. When I was 9, my 4-year old brother died from spinal meningitis. What I knew about the disease was what my father had explained to me at that time, in simple language that a 9 year old could understand. He said a germ had entered Patrick’s body and caused his brain to swell, and he wasn’t able to wake up again.

I sit up attentively on the edge of my seat with open ears, ready to hear the full detailed explanation, in real scientific terms. I am hearing that there are viral and bacterial causes, that the disease progresses quickly, and that immediate administration of IV antibiotics can usually prevent death. Then, less than five minutes later, the instructor is moving on to the next disease on the list.

My heart beats even faster. It wasn’t enough. “Wait!” I almost stand up, “There’s more!” But I remain seated and stay quiet, hunch over my desk and continue taking notes.

For me, the “more” was seeing my dad’s normally calm and care-free face twisted up in pain and horror the night the medics came; how confusing and despairing it was for me at nine years old to learn of the possibility that a little boy whose brain didn’t work right could turn into a vegetable; the new loving friendship I began feeling for God who seemed to be looking out for me when my parents, for a time, couldn’t.

There was also the touch of Patrick’s cold icy hard stiff fingers in mine as he lay in the small casket, letting me feel instantly that he wasn’t just sleeping, letting me feel fully an absence of something in his dead body, and the presence of that something in my living body. I wondered for a long while about that something and that wondering led me to the practice of holistic medicine.

TRAUMA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PHYSICAL ILLNESS

In the mid-’90s, the CDC and Kaiser Permanente discovered an exposure that dramatically increased the risk for seven out of ten of the leading causes of death in the United States. In high doses, it affects brain development, the immune system, hormonal systems, and even the way our DNA is read and transcribed. Folks who are exposed in very high doses have triple the lifetime...
risk of heart disease and lung cancer and a twenty-year difference in life expectancy. And yet, doctors today are not trained in its routine screening or treatment. Now, the exposure I’m talking about is not a pesticide or a packaging chemical. It’s childhood trauma. (Harris)

Nadine Burke Harris, M.D. is referring to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, which provided analysis on more than 17,000 individuals, and provided correlations between traumatic experiences within the first 18 years of life and adult physical and psychiatric disease. The ACE Score, determined by a patient questionnaire, attributes one point for each category of exposure to child abuse and/or neglect. The higher the score, the greater the exposure, and exponentially the risk factors are greater for development of future medical disease. Since the time of its publication in the 1990’s several studies have replicated its findings.

The negative impacts to physical health in adult life as a result of trauma are attributed to two mechanisms.

1. Individuals attempt to help themselves with the use of nicotine, alcohol, drug use, high-level promiscuity. These on their own are associated with cardiovascular, immune system, and inflammatory risks.

2. Biomedical effects occur at the time of the trauma during important childhood developmental periods and later throughout the lifespan. These changes include increased production and release of cortisol, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis dysregulation, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein and cytokines, anatomical changes in the brain. In other words, the gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, immunological, reproductive, and musculoskeletal system, neuroendocrine functioning, and brain structure and functioning are all adversely affected by trauma and for several years following the traumatic experience. (Andrea)

Women were found to be 50% more likely than men to have experienced five or more categories of ACE’s. It is suspected that these findings could be key to the higher percentage of women who have illnesses without a clear etiology such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, autoimmune disease, and chronic pain. (Felitti & Anda)

Startling to me was that boys who had an ACE Score of 6 or above had a 4,600% increased likelihood of later becoming an IV drug user, compared to a boy who has a score of 0. As one author points out “relationships of this magnitude are rare in epidemiology.” (Felitti & Anda)

These findings may not be so surprising to those who follow holistic approaches to health and healing such as Ayurveda, classical Chinese medicine, homeopathy, Naturopathy, Anthroposophic medicine, or others who view the physical body, mind and spirit as one. From a holistic medicine point of view, disharmony may originate in the physical, emotional, or deeper realms of spirit.
In this paradigm, illness is understood as disturbances or blockages in the innate flow and harmony of mind, body and spirit. In other words, all illness (regardless of the cause) exists as imbalance in this system long before it manifests in the physical body. It can take many years for emotional imbalances to become embodied in the physical tissues as ‘disease’.

By the time that it has manifested in the physical body, it may be more difficult to treat. For example, if depression is suppressed with recreational or prescribed drugs or alcohol, over time this can perpetuate symptoms of imbalance and affect other systems of the body. If, however, the original trauma that led to the depression is addressed and treated appropriately, the root of depression and addiction is transformed, and the body can express itself in a healthy life affirming way.

### WHAT IS THE LIVING BODY

*Your physically felt body is a 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 the body as it is felt from inside.*

(Gendlin)

When I discuss health and illness with my patients, it is helpful for them to have an understanding of the human body. At the same time, in response to all of the information that is at one’s fingertips, I have noticed an interesting phenomena taking place. When I ask my patient about his activity level, I frequently get the numbers of steps he takes in a day. If I inquire into a patient’s medical history, I get her cholesterol numbers and previous blood pressure readings. If I ask about diet, I am often directed to a cell phone screen that shows a graph of what was eaten that day and includes the number of calories and grams of protein. Menstrual cycle? There’s an app for that too.

As useful as this information can be, I feel a sense of confident rightness when I read Gendlin’s quote above, where the body is seen as a constant interaction with the outside environment. No single part can be understood except in its relationship to a whole complex pattern or process, which includes the interaction within the body, as well as in interaction with the environment. Relationship and fluid interaction, rather than a linear concept of cause and effect, is the underlying basis of health and disease. Therefore the intention of medicine is to align and connect us with ourselves, each other, nature and all of life.

*What I now do, feel, and think comes out of my body. This may sound odd, but where else does it come from? The mind? To separate mind and body deprives the ‘body’ of certain vitally important characteristics of living tissue….For us it is vital not to miss the fact that living bodies imply their next bits of life process.* (Gendlin)
What we call the body is more than what is enclosed in the skin. As mind and body can be understood as one connected living process, the life process that is manifesting as symptoms and disease, has the potential to offer gifts of insight and healing. During times of illness we may find ourselves invited (or demanded, shoved, pushed, kicked, dragged) to explore this undiscovered territory.

*In the West people are accustomed to think in units and nouns, and to attribute causality to individuals. “There is a boy over there” is an acceptable sentence; it is optional information whether he is running, or sitting. But one would not easily accept the sentence, “There is a running over there,” adding only later that the running is a boy.* (Gendlin)

The name we attach to a disease, like spinal meningitis or cancer or depression has a specific purpose and can help facilitate understanding rather quickly between two people. However, we needn’t get too attached to that name. It may give us reasons why we can’t change. For example, I have ADHD — therefore I can’t do such and such.

From an eastern medicine perspective, which is my background, I have been trained to see anatomical structures like the liver and lungs as more of the continual processes of change that the body goes through, moment to moment. I may point to the Liver and say, “There is regulation over there.” Or point to the Lungs and say, “There is dissension over there”. For me, this way of describing the body in verbs rather than nouns and units leads to a less permanent diagnoses and leaves the future wide open for healing and growth.

**BENEFITS OF INCLUDING FOCUSING IN A HOLISTIC MEDICAL PRACTICE**

By nature, practitioners of holistic medicine tend to be interested in the person more than the name of his or her disease. We recognize the connection between traumas experienced in the past and how they may be influencing health. Each person has a story that they come in with, and we make the time to listen. So why do I include Focusing in my practice?

**Sheila:**

*Sheila appears to be an upbeat, joyful woman who tells jokes and within our first five minutes together has me laughing. She is 45 years old, 200 pounds over her ideal body weight and was recently given a diagnosis of diabetes and osteoarthritis. She came to me seeking more dietary recommendations and tips for decreasing her sugar cravings. Her physician had discussed the risks of her weight and told her to eat a low carbohydrate diet. She has tried, just as she had tried many other diets and exercise programs in the past, but over time, wasn’t able to stick to any of them.*
She describes a continuous strong hunger, so strong that it sometimes wakes her up. At other times she wakes in the morning, surprised to discover she has eaten during the night or that she has made a trip to the grocery store late at night in a fog.

I provide some recommendations, and I ask if at our next appointment we could spend the time doing a body centered mindfulness exercise that I think might be helpful. After requesting and receiving further explanation, she agrees.

During the Focusing session she finds her jaw wanting her awareness. As she opens and closes her jaw, I have the impression of a hyena languidly savoring its prey. She describes the feeling of gnawing and gnashing those who offend her. She describes this feeling of being able to bite and tear with her teeth as the most powerful sensation. (Months later she related to me that there was one person in particular that came to mind that day, but she was too embarrassed to discuss, an ex husband that had caused her much fear by stalking her for months after they divorced.)

We continue to spend time with that good powerful feeling that comes with the gnawing and chewing. Her back is straight and tall, shoulders back, hands flat and pressing on her thighs, both feet on the floor, her teeth coming together, mouth opening and closing.

She then becomes aware of a place inside that does not feel powerful at all, but feels small and helpless and dark. She slumps over and says, “I hate this part of me.” At first she doesn’t want to listen to the part that feels powerless. So we don’t. Instead we start by listening to the part of her that hates that part.

After some time and some gentle and permissive guiding instructions, she senses that the powerless one is very young, around 6 years old, just a little girl. She becomes motherly toward her and inwardly holds her. The little girl tells her that she needs her to protect her, care for her in a way that nobody else can. There are tears, more words, more love given to the powerless little girl, and a series of deep sighs as if weight is being lifted from her shoulders.

Sheila’s case illustrates how some illness, such as obesity, diabetes, food addiction, might not on the surface appear to be related to trauma. What is more important, however, is that a process such as Focusing is assisting/allowing/making space for the life process to flow in the patient which allows change to occur. This change is often associated with a felt shift, as occurred here.

That shift, the opening, the more breathing room that comes when the force of the body’s innate knowing flows through the organism — that is what is needed to bring change.

Sheila reported after this session that she noticed she would eat when she was hungry and wouldn’t eat when she wasn’t hungry. This was no small change! She also said she was aware that she ate to soothe her emotions, but it was different to experience this knowledge in her body rather than just to know it intellectually.
There are times when I am tempted to point out connections, to excitedly express the answers as I see them. But mostly I hold back. I have learned that my understanding, even if correct, even if shared, really doesn’t matter all that much. What matters is not me, but the patient experiencing fully the forward moving direction inside.

I do find it worthwhile to do lab work to investigate possible nutrient deficiencies, food intolerances, thyroid and adrenal dysfunction, and hormonal imbalances. This insures that we are not missing something that may be relatively simple to correct. However, if we had only worked with diet and exercise, possibly natural anti-inflammatories for her joint pain and botanical medications for lowering her glucose levels, we would have missed a crucial aspect to Sheila’s underlying issue.

Safety:

When I took my first Focusing workshop in acupuncture school, I was struck by what a safe process it was. As a new and young acupuncture practitioner without a therapy background, Focusing helped me feel comfortable to just be a human being keeping another human being company. I worried less about hurting my patient with bad advice. With Focusing I’m not giving any advice. Also, I don’t need to hand my crying distraught patient a business card of a mental health practitioner while I politely escort her to the door. I can be there in the vulnerable moment when help is needed.

The Focusing process helps me as a health care provider to feel safe inside, as well. I once referred a patient of mine to a specialist for more tests because the tests we had already ordered came back with worrisome results. At her follow up visit she said to me, “I didn’t get that done. I’ve been listening to my body like you said, and it’s been telling me I don’t have cancer. So I don’t need those tests.” She waved her hand in the air like she was waving away a bothersome fly. I was able to use Focusing for all that came up in me and acknowledge all that was there — the part that wanted to be obeyed, the part that had no faith in her body, and the afraid part. Then peace came, and from underneath all of that — Trust. From the new field we shared together, I could hear her in a way that I couldn’t before. We had a clear and direct conversation, each of us speaking and listening from a place of loving grounded respect for one another.

Listening in relationship:

There is a sense of equality that I feel with Focusing. I am able to listen to how it is for another person. During this process I am not listening and trying to assess the imbalance or diagnosis. I am just listening. This is how it is. I am not giving instructions or educating or offering advice, even well-meaning advice. I am listening, receiving, taking in, and reflecting to make sure that I have it right. If I don’t, I try again, until I really ‘get it’. This kind of listening allows a patient to feel really heard and understood, which can be the most healing aspect of the entire visit.
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Trauma:

The past and the present cannot be understood if we think of them only as two different things in two different positions on a time line. The present is a different whole event. The past functions in every present.

(We can) say that past and present are both occurring now, and the present goes on in the remains of the past, and lives them forward...Yes, there is a past that is now, and this past is being altered now. Of course this is a different past than the dead and gone past which was recorded on someone’s video, and functions no longer. For some purposes we will want to keep the usual notion of that all gone past which happened long ago. But there is also the past which is inherent in any present experience, and which can function in it in various ways. (Gendlin)

My brother’s death was like a bomb going off in the center of my family’s home. It had its ripple effect on me, my parents and siblings, our relationships with each other, and future relationships with others. For years afterward, it felt like we were shrapnel shooting out in different directions as we each found our own way to live. Some of us accumulated our own disease names in the aftermath. For me it was alcoholism and clinical depression. Years later, with the help of Focusing I could find my way back to the center of the bomb site, pick up the shredded pieces, place the ones I no longer needed to the side, and hold onto the ones I wanted to keep, to tenderly share with my family.

In the mind we can get stuck in an endless maze of critically analyzing what went wrong, who is to blame, how to make sense of tragedy. Focusing keeps us in the body, in the here and now where the past is being lived forward. It is from here that we can change course and steer forward with the wind at our sails.

Empowerment:

When people have been through trauma, are trapped in their addiction, or have become accustomed to living outside of their bodies, Focusing is the most gentle way I have found to coax that person back in, to where their inner knowing awaits them. People are frequently surprised that they have their truth already inside of them. After learning basic guidelines of the Focusing process, they can go inside again and again and continue to receive guidance and insight into life situations. They do not need a drug or a book or a doctor to do this for them. They can do this on their own or better yet, with their Focusing partner.

LIVING FORWARD

Aboriginal people don’t think in terms of “I” as much. We don’t think about things as my trauma. It’s more about our trauma...It’s the trauma that occurs. It’s what we have our hands in trying to set straight. It’s more than that thing that happened. There is something that you know. There is a knowledge that you received from your life experience and that you have a responsibility to.
Grieving and complex trauma breeds compassion and social change. If a horrendous experience occurs, it is what teaches you how to be compassionate and to be the activist that you need to be to be to create the social change that is needed. (Turcotte)

Trauma, whether a single episode or multiple events over a period of time, can have deep and vast effects, not only for the person who sustained the trauma but for his or her community as well. We all feel the effects of the violence in the home, sexual abuse, childhood neglect, and the loss of dear friends in combat. Emotionally, physically, socially and economically we feel the hurts done to neighbors and loved ones, to our tribe. We also feel the shame and pain of the ones responsible for doing the hurting, often themselves reacting from the place of their own traumatization.

It is understandable why people in pain from past or ongoing experiences would want to feel better by using drugs, alcohol, self-harm, eating disorders and other behaviors. It is understandable how those of us in the health care system would want to help their patients feel better by offering antipsychotics, antidepressants, and opioids or their natural equivalents. But there can be no doubt that these methods of numbing the appropriate response of the human organism to trauma have the possibility of worsening and deepening the problem and making it more difficult for the body to develop an appropriate response to stressful events in the future.

By integrating Focusing into a medical practice we can address those places where one gets stuck, where processes get stopped. We can listen to the language of the body as it directs our patients to the next steps of healing. Illness can be a passageway into a new territory that couldn’t be arrived at in any other way other than through that illness. With help one is able to safely and lovingly navigate through the passageway while discarded and separated parts come together and unite into something far greater and more powerful than before.

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Dawn Flynn, ND, LAc is a naturopathic physician and licensed acupuncturist in Renton, WA and a member of the Dynamic Peace Learning Community in Seattle, WA. Her webpage is www.drdawnflynn.com and she can be reached at dawn@drdawnflynn.com.
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BENEFITS OF FOCUSING AND OTHER REFLECTIVE PRACTICES IN THE WORKPLACE

Charles F. Herr, Ph.D.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

I worked as a psychologist at a municipal outpatient mental health clinic for 18 years. For most of those years I was the Director of Psychological Services. After 9/11/2001, the clinic, which serves a population directly affected by the destruction of the World Trade Center towers, received a grant to train the staff in various modalities of treatment for trauma, including a training module in Focusing by Lynn Preston. That training was the beginning of my serious engagement with Focusing. (Until then I had only known of Focusing by experimenting on my own with the processes described in Gendlin’s book, Focusing.) A social worker and I followed Lynn Preston’s recommendation to form a Focusing partnership that continued over several years — but I don’t recall anyone else in the training doing so. Years later some partnerships were formed under my influence; I describe those below. I studied further with Ann Weiser Cornell, and eventually enrolled in the Focusing Institute’s training in Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy.

During the Focusing Certification Weeklong in 2008, we were asked to develop a project that we wanted to carry forward into the world. Below is how I formulated my project at the end of the weeklong:

I would like the respectful way that we connect when we are Focusing together to inform the way people relate to each other generally. If that were to happen, it would transform our social structures and would promote peaceful resolution of world conflicts. I found, in a very deep way my need for safety and connection, and my immediate project is to generate this safety and connection in my workplace. I also came to appreciate in a new way how important respect is to creating understanding. A step that I imagine taking, is using Clearing a Space with the staff at work to discover together, “What is in the way of safety?”

For many years since that time, I tried, in my role as Director of Psychology and Director of Internship Training at the clinic, to introduce Focusing — and Nonviolent Communication — into our workplace. I engaged in a number of conversations with Eugene Gendlin about how it might be possible to create a model for a Focusing-oriented organization.
MY EFFORTS TO INTRODUCE MINDFULNESS AND FOCUSING INTO THE WORKPLACE

A history and assessment of my efforts to introduce Focusing, both as a practice for individuals and as a practice that guided how we worked together, would take another article. Briefly, I guided interested staff through a Focusing process, I introduced it into my supervision, and I attempted to introduce a Focusing attitude into how meetings were conducted, allowing a safe and respectful space for all to speak (in Gendlin’s words, letting people speak their second and third sentences!) — all with varying degrees of success and failure.

Since I retired from my position in August 2013, I have maintained a relationship with the staff there who have become Focusers to various degrees. I have a weekly Focusing partnership with one psychologist at the clinic, with whom I began Focusing years ago when we were both at the clinic. He has completed four levels of training in Inner Relationship Focusing. We co-taught courses for trainees in experiential therapy and continue to teach an introduction to Focusing for externs.

In addition I have maintained some less frequent Focusing partnerships with current and former staff at the clinic. While at the clinic, I started monthly ‘Focusing lunches’ for anyone interested in Focusing, regardless of how much they knew about it. These lunches have continued since I left the clinic, and I continue to attend them. I have ongoing discussions with one administrator, whom I introduced to Focusing and NVC, and who values both practices highly.

Before I became seriously engaged with Focusing, I had an interest in meditation and mindfulness that began in my late adolescence. I brought this interest into the clinic by inviting staff for a weekly half hour meditation practice on Thursdays during lunch. These sessions often involved listening together to recordings of guided meditation created by Jon Kabat-Zinn, but participants shared with each other practices that they enjoy. Later I became part of a Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) team. Mindfulness is a central concept in DBT and mindfulness exercises are done at the beginning of every weekly DBT Consultation Team meeting. Many staff members engage in mindfulness practices, including yoga and relaxation, in addition to Focusing — and a number of them are trained in hypnosis and sometimes combine it with Focusing.

After retiring from the clinic, I interviewed staff to learn more about how they used these various practices in the workplace. I thought that, since I was no longer their “boss”, they might speak to me more freely. To be more inclusive, I decided not to limit myself to Focusing, and put Focusing under a larger umbrella that I called “Reflective Practices” (RPs). In the course of my interviews, I identified three areas in which RPs appeared to be helpful: managing stress, dealing effectively with interpersonal difficulties, and fostering organizational creativity, i.e., finding new strategies to meet the needs of the organization, the staff, and clients.
Based on interviews with ten staff members of the clinic’s Department of Behavioral Health, who engage in Reflective Practices, such as Mindfulness, meditation, Focusing, breathing, relaxation, and yoga, I provide here a summary of my findings:

1) Pausing when one is stirred up leads to more effective and creative responses and allows for new possibilities for relating and acting.

2) It is important to choose carefully with whom to be open. (It is not safe to Focus with everyone, and pausing is sometimes misunderstood as weakness or indecisiveness.)

3) The direction that Focusing and other RPs take is sometimes not predictable in advance. RPs can lead to initiating collaborative efforts for constructive change and to discovering more adaptive or effective practices on a personal and professional level. They can improve relationships with clients in therapy. And they can lead people to leave a situation or an organization that is experienced as life-blocking or as not in line with deep life purpose and values. Sometimes people discover passions that they were unaware of and branch onto new paths.

There is a huge uncharted territory regarding how relationships at work can become truly collaborative and whether RPs alone (including Focusing) are sufficient to bring about that change.

Three areas in particular were examined:

1) **Stress**: All interviewees agreed that RPs help with managing stress by increasing self-awareness and promoting more centeredness in self, more groundedness, and more clarity.

2) **Interpersonal Conflict**: All interviewees agreed that pausing, when they are feeling reactive or stirred-up, helps to find solutions to interpersonal difficulties. Several mentioned that taking time when in a conflict to become aware of one’s own needs and the needs of the other person — or seeing the issue from the other person’s point of view as well as one’s own — helps to establish a compassionate connection.

For example, our staff became embroiled in a divisive conflict when, at the end of October 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New York City, shutting down transportation and electrical power in lower Manhattan (where the clinic is) for nearly a week. The hospital stayed open for inpatients and outpatients using generators. Many staff who live outside of Manhattan were unable to come in, but others such as myself, were able to walk to work — I live 2 miles away — through the inclement weather. One psychiatrist heroically took hours to make it in from a suburb north of New York City.

A staff controversy arose about the fairness of the hospital’s policy not to pay staff who had not come in. Was it fair not to pay those who couldn’t make it in — or who decided it would not be worth the effort? Was it fair to those who did make it in through inclement weather, with no transportation, and who worked the day without heat, cellphone service, and running water? Unresolved arguments broke about among our clinic’s staff.

Another staff person with whom I had Focused for some years and I had a fairly heated exchange at a staff meeting: She thought it was unfair to penalize those who could not — or
decided not — to come in because of the hurricane’s extraordinary circumstances; I thought it was not fair to those who did make it in to have their extraordinary efforts compensated in the same way as those who stayed home. After the meeting, we sat down and talked through our feelings, and I was better able to see her point of view. We didn’t arrive at a solution, but harmony and mutual respect were established. I think the Focusing connection that we previously had helped a lot.

On the other hand, another staff person continued to be very angry at what he interpreted as the uncaring attitude of top hospital administrators during Sandy. I knew some of his views were based on misinformation, but he was not open to hearing me, and perhaps I did not empathize sufficiently with his needs. I tried to speak with him as well, but we were not able to arrive at an understanding connection. My sense is that over the course of a work relationship of several years, we remained connected on a relatively cognitive level and did not establish a deeper felt sense connection. Thus, I conclude that NVC and Focusing, or at least my own limited skills with these practices, were not sufficient to bridge all discord. On the other hand, in some cases these tools did help ease stalemates.

3) Organizational creativity: Some interviewees described instances where new collaborative approaches were found by taking time to re-examine the current practices and allow new possibilities or ideas to emerge. Sometimes, however, efforts to find new creative solutions were constrained by concerns that new methods might interfere with certain organizational imperatives/goals.

Some interviewees noted that an important element in promoting organizational creativity in meetings is that the person leading the meeting to provide space (i.e., pauses, quiet moments) for participants to connect to their feelings and better formulate their thoughts. Also, the ability of the leader of the group to listen non-defensively and reflect the main points of participants did promote organizational creativity. The practice of listening in this way, with attention, is an integral part of Focusing.

Obstacles to RPs:

Interviewees reported that the heavy workload and organizational pressure to ‘produce’ can make it hard to remember to take even brief moments during the day to center oneself. Also, they mentioned the problem that RP’s are not scheduled into the structure of work, except in DBT Consultation Meetings. Another obstacle was the lack of professional reward for their RP practice.

What Focusing shares with other RPs and how it differs.

All RPs share some form of pausing as part of the practice: In its most basic form pausing involves taking the time to observe or notice feelings, thoughts, body processes and sensations, such as breathing. All RPs promote a kind of “observational space” in which a greater sense of centeredness or groundedness can grow. But, in addition to observing, Focusing involves relating and learning to listen to our felt body sense of situations. Inviting and allowing of a holistic body sense of a situation to form is more than attending to a simple
feeling like sadness or anger. The felt sense has an intricacy to it from which new steps and possibilities can emerge.

**Focusing Workplace Partnerships**

Focusing, in contrast to most other RPs, is frequently done in partnerships with one person, who is speaking or sitting quietly, and attending to their felt sense of a situation — with another person listening attentively without giving advice or opinions. It is hard at work to find space for such partnerships.

However, Focusing partnerships were, and continue to be, a very important part of my experience at the clinic. I introduced Focusing in my supervision of interns, always respecting whether they wanted to engage with me in that way. Several of these supervisory relationships graduated into Focusing partnerships, usually intermittently, but occasionally more regularly. With some staff, I introduced what I called “Brother, can you spare a time.” For example, another staff person and I would agree that if either of us were upset by something, we could ask for five minutes. During that time, usually little or nothing was said about the content or cause of the upset; often the five minutes would be largely silent. The silent presence of another person, as one spent time with the felt sense of what was upsetting, could be enormously helpful. In this way, I not only received and gave support, I also modeled and taught *sensing inwardly* and *keeping company* with something inside. You could say that we became “empathy medics,” people on the job who knew how to provide empathy to stressed and distressed co-workers.

I read Kye Nelson’s very helpful description of how to create Focusing partnerships at work, (http://www.focusing.org/partnership/partner_info/work_partnerships.html) and passed the article on to several coworkers, some of whom agreed to form such partnerships.

I was not the only one to form such partnerships. I know of at least three other such partnerships. In one case, I coached former supervisees in how to be Focusing partners with each other. They became a very important source of support for each other in handling job stress and formed a very important bond.

These partnerships served as a place and space, where the partners could spend 10 to 20 minutes with an unclear or stuck issue and gain greater clarity, ease, and often a concrete step would occur to them that would help their situation. The kinds of issues that often came up included balancing work pressures with family life and other responsibilities, such as coping with despair about situations that felt intractable, interpersonal difficulties at work, countertransference reactions with clients, and therapies that felt stuck or unproductive. Consequently, they would feel better able to be present and available with a client in the next session. Frequently after Focusing, people would gain a better understanding of what was troubling them, and feel lighter and freer afterwards, and sometimes even have new ideas about how to deal with the situation.

While Director of Psychology, I tried to support and foster Focusing partnerships by distributing a description of the possible benefits, asking psychology staff to rate their interest on a Likert scale. There was some expressed interest, but little of that resulted in
actual partnerships. Some psychology externs, who were under less time pressure, formed fruitful Focusing partnerships with my coaching.

Where did we find time for such partnerships? Did they not take time away from work activities, such as seeing clients or doing documentation? The pressures of work are, in fact, the main factor making Focusing work partnerships hard to maintain. When I now Focus with my ongoing partner, we do our practice during his lunch hour. He finds that taking some quiet Focusing-time both supportive and nurturing and does not mind devoting part of his lunchtime for this purpose. Others want their full lunch hour and choose to find other times to Focus. Almost all staff members work through part of their lunchtime occasionally, or work late and rarely take the breaks allowed by their union contract. Since Focusing does not normally involve more than a half hour total a week, the process hardly interferes with “stats,” i.e., the number of billable encounter-hours with clients, in a day or a week.

As the Director of Psychology, I observed that the psychologists who had Focusing partners invariably had among the highest encounter rates — the largest number of monthly patient visits — in the department. Because the small amount of time spent in Focusing helped me to manage stress, gain clarity, find more effective ways to work, and improved the quality of my therapeutic relationships, and I often worked an extra hour or two several days a week, I did not feel that I was taking away “company time” to Focus.

My Methods

A word is in order here about my methods. I made no attempt to do my interviews in a traditionally scientific manner, and I make no claim to rigor in that sense.

I was not a spectator observing the situation from the outside. All the interviewees knew me, and all had had the experience of working under my directorship when I was Director of Psychological Services. I was very much part of the situation I was studying, and I have continued a relationship with many of the interviewees. I was myself one of the interviewees.

Rather than have a single set of questions for all interviewees, I sat with my “thinking partner” before interviewing a participant, and allowed my felt sense to guide me in forming the questions that I wanted to ask that person. When I interviewed an individual, I sometimes started with one of those questions, or returned later to one of my preformed questions, but I did not hold rigidly to the questions, preferring for the most part to let the interview follow its own course. A more precise word than ‘interview’ for my meetings with the participants would be ‘dialogue’ around a set of questions or concerns. I did not tape the interviews, preferring to take notes, because I thought that notes would lead to a more relaxed interchange.

My stance was not one of a neutral, detached researcher. Although I was very committed to maintaining an open, respectful attitude toward the participants’ views and their experiences, I was aware that, like the Elton Mayo experiments in the Hawthorne plants, my interviews were themselves a kind of intervention, stimulating a thinking and experiencing process about the topics addressed.
I also solicited the active engagement of participants by giving them a summary of my findings and requesting their feedback.

CONCLUSION

I have provided here a brief account of my attempts to introduce Focusing — and NVC — into a workplace of which I was an integral part for many years. These efforts were recognized and honored. I received an award for clinical excellence for introducing NVC as a method for working with “difficult patients” (which would be more appropriately referred to from an NVC perspective as patients whom we found difficult to work with) and, when a much loved Director of Social Work died of cancer, the Director of the Behavioral Health Department invited me to lead a Focusing attunement at the beginning of a Memorial Service for her.

However, my attempts fell short of the vision that Gendlin and I had for creating a model of a Focusing-Oriented Organization. A set of Focusing organizational principles that I developed and shared with staff met with some resistance, primarily because a number of the staff did not take to Focusing, or perhaps because Focusing is a practice that implies a vulnerability that does not feel safe for many in a workplace. Focusing was never adopted by the organization as a whole and my attempts to introduce the process met ambivalence that took the form of a combination of largely friendly teasing and appreciation.

I consider this experiment to be part of a larger project to be shared by others who are engaged in various forms of Community Wellness Focusing. All of us seek to discover ways in which Focusing can enter into the life of communities and organizations and transform them into more humane places. We are working to ultimately create a deep change in society so that various forms of coercive relationships (power over) can turn into communities of individuals working together (power with), enhancing the quality of living for each person in the organization and the people that organization serves.

Charles F. Herr, Ph.D. is clinical psychologist with a private practice in New York City. In addition to being Focusing Oriented Psychotherapist, he is a graduate from the William Alanson White Institute’s Program in Psychoanalysis. He has received intensive training in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Nonviolent Communication. He is interested in how Focusing and Nonviolent Communication can be integrated into efforts to create a society where every person is supported to develop freely in the context of caring community. He can be reached at: Email: cf83@tc.columbia.edu Phone: 917-714-2348.
TOUCHING THE SOUL:
A Sexual Dilemma

Bala Jaison, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT:

I wrote the original article, Touching the Soul, for the Folio in 1992. The content was not particularly on my mind until the topic of the piece came up at the 2015 International in Seattle — apparently the subject had touched a group of people there, who strongly suggested that I consider re-publishing it (since we’ve gotten a lot of new members in the past 20-plus years). In looking the article over, I realized that the content is as relevant now, almost 24 years later, as it was at the original writing.

And, as I wrote the first time around, as profound as the subject matter seems to be — at least to me — I don’t see/hear/experience anyone discussing this topic or making mention of it, any more than I did 24 years ago...ummm...

So, with some updated revisions (and deletions), I would like to address this topic once again, and as I requested the first time around, please see/notice/observe whether the theme resonates with your own direct experience, or strikes a chord of familiarity and resonance.

I will end this abstract with the last line of the original article: If the content moves you, my hope is that more dialogue will ensue, because we are talking about the essence of human-spiritual connection: Touching the Soul.

TOUCHING THE SOUL: A SEXUAL DILEMMA

“When love is the only residue of all your accounts with the Earth, then will the Earth acquit you of your debt.” —The Book of Mirdad

This article is about sex — sort of.

It is about a particular aspect of attraction to other people for which we don’t currently have a term-of-expression in our present culture. It is about that aspect of loving, caring, and even passionate attractions between growing, evolving people, that are meant to be non-sexual and non-romantic, yet feel magnetic, powerful, and often irresistible.

On a metaphysical level, the experience is one of an overwhelming outpouring of the heart, which draws two or more people together with such a passion and sense of bonding that the feelings one carries inside might, due to lack of language, be confused with sexual
attraction. Barbara Marx Hubbard (Hubbard, 1976) called this phenomenon “supra-sex”, a term which only partially resonates for me. I’ve toyed with meta-sex, Divine Intimacy, and meta-relationship, but these terms don’t quite fit either.

I have been exploring metaphysics, spirituality, and personal growth for some 40-plus years now. Over the course of that time I have noticed a most interesting and dynamic phenomenon: People are falling in love with each other at an increasingly rapid rate — and no, I am not referring here to any and all people. I am referring specifically to those people/beings who pursue inner work (also referred to as ‘spirituality’) as a matter of course; people who have experienced opening up interiorly and have made a profound connection with others; people who know about love and loving in a safe and trusting atmosphere, and who consciously seek out others’ who also seem to be operating from these supra-aware channels. I also have some concern (and the motivation for writing this piece) for those people who are just beginning to experience ‘awakening consciousness’ — especially collectively with others — and don’t yet have the vocabulary or structure to describe the complexity and intricacy of this inner journey; people who might be confused or distressed as to what may be happening to them. Let me begin, by trying to articulate what exactly this supra-experience is:

When we experience this connected and attuned type of relationship, something in us connects with “the more” (Gendlin, 1981) in ourselves, and consequently the more in others. In the field of metaphysics we might refer to this phenomenon as soul-to-soul contact. It is an experience of being ‘touched’ so deeply, so totally by another, that in the actual moment of the experiencing, there are, in all probability, no words to articulate the complexity of multiple feelings that arise.

The experience is of seeing other people beyond their ‘form’, beyond their limitations as human beings. It is a seeing and knowing someone from such a highly connected place, that the heart feels as if it might explode from the ecstatic rush of connection, synchronicity, and unity. In-the-moment one feels totally heard, seen, acknowledged — at the deepest level of being. There is, in that magical moment, an experiencing of one’s own existence as a soul, a space where we truly see ourselves clearly — reflected in the heart and eyes of another.

The result of this type of experience is very complex: There is an enormous amount of highly charged energy, which I would like to suggest, has not been adequately addressed, especially in the context of: What are we supposed to do with it!

This connection, as I have experienced it (and observed with others), can happen on one or more levels of consciousness, simultaneously. I therefore have no qualms about calling this multi-leveled-magical-experience supra-simultaneous-orgasm or meta-physical orgasm (the orgasm part is not the issue!)

Let us explore some of the levels on which this experience might occur:

On the etheric, vital or sentient level (also referred to as the ‘energy body’) the experience can be registered as an impactful, sensitive, and sensuous attunement that includes:
• Sensing the non-verbal energy of another with such clarity, that it feels as if the other was actually speaking aloud.

• Being able to ‘read’ someone else’s mind/heart/feelings at an energetic level.

• Feeling the impulse to move with another (e.g. dance, walk in perfect sync, sing, play music) in order to create a further sense of unison, or harmony.

• Sensing of physical fluidity with another: non-sexual, yet a powerfully energetic ‘high’ — and — sometimes very confusing for the spiritual neophyte.

• Fine-tuned sensing of another’s feeling-states (as if they were our own).

• Feeling as if you are inside of another’s feelings with a seemingly complete recognition and felt-understanding of how they are inside.

While the above points are not necessarily erotic, they are certainly alluring as in: magnetic, irresistibly drawn to, and stimulating (to the senses). On the mental level, a term that comes to mind for this supra-aware experience is telepathic rapport. It is something like being able to read another’s thoughts, finish another’s sentences, and knowing directly someone else’s thought-flow process. There is a sense of rapture, as two minds intertwine and connect in a like-minded way, whether the connection is around philosophy, points of view, common interests, or simply a sense of joint-knowing: knowing-that-you-know, knowing that the other knows exactly the same thing that you know — the ah ha! experience. The energy of these encounters can be so intense and finely tuned, that mind-blowing and mentally orgasmic are two terms I have often used to describe the experience or state of mind to myself.

Then there is what we might loosely refer to as soul-alignment or spiritual at-one-ment. This level of connection is multi-dimensional, however the key feature (in my experience) is an opening of the heart that is so full, so richly powerful, that it feels as if one might burst from the overwhelming feeling of the outpouring and incoming energy of love. As a former teacher of mine expressed it:

“We are all walking tuning forks with our own unique notes, pitches, and tonal-ities which may be sympathetically triggered by others in the environment…it is all a question of reverberation, resonance, and synchronicity…”

Although the experience of soul-alignment is not necessarily a sexual attraction, the terms we use to describe an actual sexual experience also fit the description of this supra-spiritual-connection.

• Internal foreplay: The budding awareness that two or more people are ‘touching’ into the world of ideas as they explore together shared visions, ideals, feelings….

• Intensity: The gradual build-up of energy as minds/souls intertwine around various subjects, the inner sense of which is, Yes! Me, too, that’s exactly the way I have it!!

• Simultaneous peak experience: A crescendo feeling, so intense that words are lost and sometimes narrowed-down to the most simplistic language like Wow!
• **Orgasmic:** Explosive — as in *shared revelation* and *shared understanding*.

• **Release:** A gentle winding down, a joyful feeling of being ‘spent’.

It is interesting to note that we often have such intense connections with people that we actually limit the amount of time we can *bear* to spend with them as there is, in addition to the feeling of elation in these interactions, often a feeling of exhaustion that comes with the discharge of so much internal energy (for example, staying up all night in rapt conversation).

To complicate matters further, this supra-sexual experience is definitely *not* a monogamous one, and since monogamy is considered the norm in our culture, I believe that we need to address — very open-mindedly — how we are to handle and feel comfortable with the dynamics of falling in love with more than one soul/being at a time — sometimes with many beings in a lifetime — especially if we are in a committed dyadic relationship.

I vividly recall the developing process around this whole topic of *supra-connection*, and where I started to address the subject openly for the first time. It started in the 80’s during the Focusing Week-Longs that I co-taught with Mary McGuire at Villa Redeemer. In brief, by the middle of the training of intense (and also playful) psychological work, the participants were so connected and so attuned to each other (both as individuals and as a whole group) that some participants began to question the relationships and lifestyles they’d left at home. As group leaders, we started feeling some concern as we watched attractions forming, and participants questioning: *Why doesn’t my mate understand me this way? Why doesn’t s/he listen to me this way? Why do I feel more valued and nurtured here, with people I’ve just met, than I do with anyone at home?* Needless to say we not only addressed the subject openly, we made a habit (on the last morning of the training) of spending almost an hour addressing the process (and potential problems) of *re-entry* back to the life that the participants were returning to at home.

(As a parenthetical aside, I have often wondered whether these non-monogamous spiritual attractions might have been the downfall of many of the intentional-live-in communities of the 60’s and 70’s, where nuclear families dissolved and dissipated into the power, pull, and energy of the larger group — a subject for another paper!)

If I had to identify a ‘bottom line’, I’d say that the issue of *meta-attraction* boils down to one word: ENERGY — its flow, its direction, and our ability to manage that energy — *wisely*.

Some background:

The science of Yoga deals with the complexity of how energy is used, stored, spent, flows, and controlled. In particular is the systematic study of the chakras: wheels or vortexes of energy located in the *etheric body*. These energy centers correspond to the endocrine system in the physical body.

**Briefly:**

There are 7 chakras or energy centers: 3 below the diaphragm (base of spine, sacral center, and solar plexus) which correspond to the instinctive, animalistic, and personality nature of human beings, and 4 above the diaphragm (heart, throat, pineal gland or 3rd
eye, and top of the skull) which correspond to a person’s intuitive and spiritual nature. By controlling, directing, and elevating, i.e. drawing up this energy, one gradually learns, with practice, to transmute the substance of personal will and ego, (sometimes called ‘the lower self’) “What I want”, into a more refined, sensitive, and compassionate vehicle for service, “What is wanted of me?” (asked by the ‘Higher Self’, or Soul).

This ingenious and scientific system works. The only problem (especially as it was initially intended by the yogis in ancient times) is that its end result was a sort of celibate and transcendent state — in itself a remarkable state-of-being that takes one internally to lofty and subtle levels of meditation and consciousness. However, this ancient system does not deal with how we share these states interactionally, or how we are to cope with the tremendous and sometimes overwhelming attractions we feel towards others as the heart opens up into greater inclusiveness and compassion — which brings us full circle to the dilemma of: What are we supposed to do with this energy?

As I ponder this question, the first word that comes is tolerance, and I am not here referring to the concepts of empathy and understanding. I am meaning the ability to bear it: to withstand increasingly higher levels of what we might call energetic or spiritual voltage, enlarging our capacity to tolerate and bear the intensity and force of this meta energy, or supra aware experience. (Think of the difference between the thick wiring on your washing machine and dryer, verses the thin wire on your bedside lamp.) The point: We need proper wiring to handle the increased voltage!

Another set of words that fit for me are discipline and concentration: Equipping our energy systems to remain centered, stable, and comfortable through the intensity of these profound energy exchanges. Practices such as yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, martial arts, and even regular aerobic exercises prepare the body for this increasing energetic voltage. The practice of Focusing, developed by Eugene Gendlin, Ph.D. teaches a way of listening inside to the bodily felt-sense of our experience in order to articulate (to ourselves) our own unique, internalized understanding of life, situations, and inner complexity.

In metaphysical parlance we might describe the meta-energy-experience in this way: As the soul increasingly makes its presence felt in an attempt to impress itself upon the untrained (and often unruly) personality, there is often a backlash of resistance from that personality (or Critic) as it tries to maintain the status quo.

In Experiential Psychotherapy (and using Focusing-oriented terms here) the same statement might be expressed in this way: As the Self (or adult-self) becomes more present and prevalent, allowing the inner felt-sense to express itself more freely, sub-personalities, or parts — fearful of losing their power — attempt to resist and block the new incoming energy to maintain homeostasis, or the status quo.

No matter what linguistic terminology we use, we can safely say that concentration is sporadic, discipline is not yet grounded, and tolerance for the whole issue of personal and spiritual development (with its consequent light and dark periods and intense energy cycles) is frequently questioned. The student often finds him/her self in fluctuating states of supra or ill health, or battling bouts of obsessive-compulsive behaviors (a retaliation by the sub-personalities or parts) to the newly imposed rhythms of the Soul or Self — only to be balanced days or weeks later by periods of extreme peace and calm. In metaphysics, this
yo-yo period is often referred to as the *schizophrenic phase of discipleship*. In Focusing we often talk about stabilizing or protecting ‘the new’ and trusting the process.

Over time, as a new rhythm is established between the Soul and personality, or between the Self and all of its various un-integrated parts; a higher tolerance is reached at every level of consciousness. The body becomes stronger and is able to cope with and channel the increasing voltage and frequency of energy (think thicker wiring). The mind becomes more still, more thoughtful, more contemplative, and is able to focus and concentrate for increasingly longer periods of time. The heart begins to open toward the authentic Self — and the authentic Self of others; there is an increased sense of compassion, empathy, and a feeling of global connectedness. The urge-to-service becomes stronger, as does the ability to stay balanced in the swirl of incoming energies and forces — what John Lilly referred to as “remaining still in the center of the cyclone”. Focusing calls it “holding the space”. It means being solid as a rock in the tumultuous process of growth, events, and unexpected turmoil — for ourselves and others. It means learning about, safety, strength, and inner stability, for ourselves and others.

It is around this time of increasing spiritual awareness that we start becoming attracted to — and attracting to ourselves — like-minded, like-souled, like-energied beings; people that we *sense* or *intuitively know* have tread or are treading very similar paths to our own; people with whom we feel connected, understood by, *instantly and empathically*, although we don’t know their history or their personal stories — yet. Curiously, it is only on the physical plane that we use the term “opposites attract.” In metaphysical terminology the Law of Attraction states that: “*Like attracts like.*” (Bailey, 1970.)

At this more advanced stage of connection, many people find themselves falling madly and passionately in love with other beings — in mind, heart, and soul. They are not necessarily experiencing sexual attraction, yet the feelings are as powerful and overwhelming as any initial courtship: intense desire to be with, constant thought about, feelings of emptiness without the other, magnetic pull toward...

Some people find themselves in a panic due to lack of language or structure of this meta experience — and consequent lack of reasonable explanations as to what might be happening to them: *I’m already in a relationship. Does this mean I’m no longer in love with my mate?...that I want to cheat on my partner?* Where there is a strong resonance with someone of the same sex, one may wonder: *Am I gay?* Or the situation is interpreted as a spiritual crisis: *This must be a test about learning to control my emotions.* Some people shut down and withdraw: *Too many people, too much energy, too vulnerable and scary...*

Others allow for and learn to *contain* the increase of this dynamic energy — something like developing a new, thicker wiring system to handle the higher voltage. Some turn to sexual expression and may later regret it because literally, the *felt-sense* of a supra-sexual experience and the actual physical sexual act don’t *fit or match*. Is it any wonder that people experience confusion and sometimes burnout from these encounters!

I have experienced this phenomenon countless times, both with individuals, as well as at certain large group gatherings and workshops where there is a build-up of intense group energy. I particularly recall a conference that I attended a number of years ago in Chicago. The group was one that I had been affiliated with for many years, and in which I had many
good friends and colleagues. I looked around the circle in the opening session. There were 79 people at that gathering. I knew about 65 of them. Of the 65, I still held close to my heart some profound one-to-one connections that I’d had with some of them in the past, plus some powerfully deep small-group-connections — in addition to an ongoing-history with many of them — and I distinctly remember wondering, in a passing moment of sensory-overwhelm: How am I possibly going to connect meaningfully with all of the people I care about here — not to mention the ones I want to know better! This is the dilemma of the soul when it is touched by the spirit of universal love and connection. I am clear that there is no one-answer to address these issues. I am also clear that the more these issues are addressed the more answers there will be.

Whatever work we do — meaning both outer work (our jobs) and inner work (our personal inner paths/journeys) — inherently has, in all probability, some structure and discipline that safely holds the space. Structure and discipline are often related to time: We know when we work, and when the workday ends. We make time to exercise, socialize, eat, sleep and relax. Hopefully, we plan time for thinking, for creativity, reflection, and integration of new ideas, and concepts. If we are consciously treading a spiritual path, then in all probability we also have various practices and structures designed to bring discipline to our bodies, emotions, and minds — and we make time for those practices. Now I wonder whether we need to create some kind of model or form to address the possible ways that we might better manage the enormous output of energy that happens as we collectively tread the path of consciousness with others? Certainly, we need to name and label this meta-magnetism, if we want to have a more viable structure to contain it.

Consider the word acknowledgment, which according to Webster means, “to admit as true; to give thanks for; to reward”. Perhaps we need, as a possible step, to articulate and validate as true, this heightened, shared energy-experience. Perhaps we need to gather more information about others’ experiences, sharing our own in the process.

Another step might be learning to bear-it-together, meaning open discussion with others while this intense experience is occurring: Are you feeling this too? What is happening in you, right now…? This is what is happening in me, right now. It seems that this kind of interaction would involve tremendous self-permission to have, own, and enjoy the intense pleasure of these feelings and interactions. If I may be so bold, I feel that many people have difficulty fully experiencing the sensations of pleasure and aliveness on a physical sexual level. On this Meta level, the dynamics can be even more complex and often more powerful since (it seems to me) the touch of the soul to the human heart out-performs and out-lives, in felt-memory, the touch of the human anatomy.

Finally, I believe that we need to address this energy phenomenon more openly and more often. As the planet continues to shrink, as we increasingly experience ourselves as part of the ‘global village’, as we become more interconnected and aware of each other, we are going to find ourselves falling passionately in love with more and more beings. We will increasingly be ‘touched’ by their ideas, their dreams, their creativity and potential, and we may be most touched by their willingness and ability to love (us!)

In the Focusing community, there is a structure for planned time to be together in a particular kind of relationship called, ‘Focusing Partnerships’. These are ‘couples’ (same or opposite sex is irrelevant), some of whom have been meeting together on a regular basis
for years, (usually weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly) to share time for Focusing/listening and processing, in equal turns. (I often call it “free therapy”.) According to some of Janet Klein’s research (on which she did her doctoral thesis) many of these relationships contain the fundamentals of a solid marriage (excluding sex): intimacy, caring, sharing, friendship, attunement, shared sacred space, comfort and ease. The Focusing process may hold personal solutions in a deeply personal, highly individualistic way — and if the Focusing process can actually contribute to the understanding of this human capacity to love and connect, the outcome could conceivably be of immense healing for the world.

To date, Focusing Partnership’s have proven to be some of the most balanced, grounded, and contained-form of non-sexual intimacy that I’ve encountered so far — a model for meta-relationship.

Then, there are the other kinds of encounters, the brief ones, those magical moments with grand and exquisite people with whom we cross paths for moments, days, finite periods of time; people who touch our souls to the depths of our being, whom we will remember vividly and never see again; people with whom we’ve shared our most intimate inner places as if we’ve known them forever — but we’ve only just met.

We need to find a name for this interactional intimacy, this meta-magnetism, and a form in which it is very ok to experience and express it: fully, openly, freely, ecstatically — and safely.

Bala Jaison, Ph.D. is a Registered Psychotherapist in private practice in Toronto, Canada and a Certifying Coordinator for the Focusing Institute, and one of the Editors of this Folio. She is the author of Integrating Experiential and Brief Therapy: How To Do Brief Therapy — Deeply and How To Do Deep Therapy Briefly. Contact: balaj@sympatico.ca

REFERENCES


A subway car carries lifetimes of experiences. Sounds give way to visual acoustics; tones born of the changing light illuminate the tilt of a young woman’s head, the gesture of the doorman’s body at the end of a workday.

As a psychotherapist, listening affords me the privilege of reflecting things that are formulated from a depth of experience. As a portrait artist, similarly, I respectfully regard the whole person across from me, as we pause between stops: sitting, reading, napping, observing…drawing. A quietude occurs in the otherwise noisy subway car. My pencil touches a fresh page in my palm-sized sketchbook, as my felt-sense of the person travels through my hand and magically appears as a record of my experience.

Here are a few samples of the hundreds of quick portrait drawings I have of travelers between subway stops over several years. The drawings often take no longer than four or five minutes, yet represent whole lives.
Acknowledgments: My work appears here with very special thanks to Carolyn Kasper for her lovely warmth and mastery as a graphic designer.

Robin Kappy, LCSW, is a certified Focusing Oriented Psychotherapist, supervisor and visual artist, with Focusing being central to all of her work. Specialties include anxiety, depression, relationships and creativity. In addition to Focusing Certification, she is trained in Relational Self-Psychology and EMDR. Her published essays detailing how beauty and the creative process has deepened her work and informed her life and work as a psychotherapist have been very well received. Her drawings and paintings have won awards and appeared in numerous venues, including the National Arts Club in New York City. She can be reached at www.creativefocusing.org or at robinkappylcsw@verizon.net. More samples of her art may be seen at www.robinkappy.blogspot.com.
FOCUSING AND TEENAGERS:
A Research Project Based on Sequenced Graphic Expression

Luis López González, Ph.D., Carlos González, Inés Zubeldia, Txemi Santamaría, and Caroline Copestake

INTRODUCTION

There aren’t many quantitative studies on the use of Focusing in adolescents or of studies on Focusing and drawing with adolescents. Specifically we are not aware of any quantitative studies on the effectiveness of sequenced drawing and adolescents’ ability to Focus.

Boukidis (1985) was one of the first to address the topic of Focusing in childhood and adolescence. His interventions were based on a psychotherapeutic approach in the parent-child relationship. Broertjes (1996) did the same from a therapeutic approach based on games.

Later, other studies were done on Focusing and childhood development (Karno, 2012; Bruinix, 1993; Iberg, 1997; Klein, 1998; Marder, 1997; Nelson, 1997). Some studies took place specifically at school (Conway, 1997; Stapert, 1997) and others in non-academic settings (Mepkyp, 1997; Neagu, 1988). Likewise, one study concentrated on the use of Focusing and its effect on the teacher-pupil relationship (Cornelius-White, 2007). Another relevant research project was that of Ellison-Cole (2003) who explored the ways that Focusing could help adolescents establish their self-identity and self-assertion. Also worth mentioning is the study of Focusing in the TREVA Program (Experiential Relaxation Techniques in the classroom) for adolescents (López-González, 2010) which was carried out in more than 50 schools in Spain.

As far as applying Focusing in the realm of artistic expression, Mepkyp (1997) used hand painting as an artistic resource to enable ways of expressing the felt sense. The author concluded that artistic expression helped in working with conscious psychological material, as well as with the person’s unconscious mind. In addition, she also observed how expressing the felt sense with hand painting was both agreeable and entertaining for adolescents. Because of the high safety level in Focusing, the process also ensured adolescents’ sense of privacy, generating a feeling of both security and relaxation, which allowed the students to participate more confidently in the experience.

The research done by Neagu (1988) was certainly pertinent to our research. Drawing was used as a mirror to verify and adjust the handle-step, that is, verifying that the drawing genuinely expressed what the child was feeling/experiencing at the time. The author emphasized the importance of the relationship that took place between the adult and child, or adolescent. For this author the most important aspect of the study was that the minors
managed to connect with their inner felt sense through the process of drawing rather than the traditional modes of words or movement. The process of expressing the felt sense through drawing seemed to help children and adolescents create a distance from ‘that’ on which they were Focusing and might, in the long term, lead to a higher level of self control in handling their inner experience.

Similarly, in her article, Rappaport (1988) analysed the possibilities drawing offers to enhance the Focusing process. In addition to drawing as a means of adjusting the handle, Rappaport suggested specific questions to expand the description of the felt sense.

Finally, Leijssen (1992) featured drawing as a means of nonverbal communication that can facilitate the internal dialogue for the participants. In our study, we wanted to find out if sequenced drawing is useful as a way for adolescents to express the felt sense as well as to delve more deeply into their Focusing process. Using an internal dialogue, the participants are invited to draw the sensations they experience as well as simultaneously self-observing the changes that take place inside them.

**Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to encourage the use of Focusing with adolescents and to suggest the use of drawing to facilitate its expression. The first objective is to know whether adolescents have the ability to comfortably work in a Focusing way while drawing; and the second objective is to know if, for those selected students, sequenced drawing is a good expressive resource for Focusing.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

Thirty-nine students took part in this research. They were students of two bacca-laureate programs from a Secondary Institute in the province of Barcelona (Spain). It was convenient to select this population because one of the investigators had previously carried out relaxation training sessions there. All the participants had had at least seven 50-minute sessions of Experiential Relaxation Techniques (López, 2010) during their physical education class. Their involvement was voluntary and with informed consent.

**Tools**

We used three instruments of our own creation: a body somatogram, a template for the drawing, and a Focusing based script-questionnaire.
Body somatogram

Created by López-González (2011), a body somatogram is a tool to help adolescents develop a clearer awareness of their internal body phenomenon. An empty human silhouette is presented on a white sheet of paper. On the paper, the adolescent is asked to use lines and colours to represent different sorts of psycho-corporal signs (sensations, emotions, feelings...), locating and reflecting them as reliably as possible.

Drawing and sequenced expression template

Participants are given a white sheet of paper divided into six equal parts, three on the upper portion and three underneath. They are instructed to draw their first felt sense in the first square, and then at three minute intervals, draw five more felt senses in each of the successive squares.

Guideline-Questionnaire for sequenced drawing of Focusing

The Guideline-Questionnaire consists of nine instructions and one last item referring to the whole change (to be completed by trainer) (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: Guideline-Questionnaire for sequenced drawing Focusing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUESTIONNAIRE-GUIDELINE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Draw the two most disagreeable sensations (here-now).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Draw the two most agreeable sensations (here-now).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Make an inventory of issues and choose one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Draw the felt-sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Draw the felt-sense every three minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is the worst about feeling all of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. And what is the best about feeling all of this? Is there something good about Focusing on this in the here and now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What does this sensation encourage you to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you consider that you have recognized the felt sense?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Has there been any change during the process? (To be completed by trainer)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedure

The research took place in a classroom in a center after school hours. The students were given a somatogram, a drawing template, and a list of participation rules. Listed below are the five phases of the sequenced drawing, based on the steps in Focusing.

First stage: The first five minutes were spent getting prepared. For the second five minutes we asked the students to draw in the somatogram (corporal silhouette), the two most disagreeable and two most agreeable sensations, sensed at that moment. Then they wrote a list of issues that were interfering with their happiness and were asked to select one of them.

Second stage: We suggested that they form a felt sense related to the selected issue, and after a brief felt-moment, to draw in the somatogram what they were experiencing, as accurately as possible. Then, as the starting point of the sequence, we asked them to copy the drawing into the first space in the expression template (picture 1, minute 1).

Third stage: We encouraged the students to observe the felt sense and draw a picture of it every three minutes, a total of five times, so as to fill in the chart with six drawings.

Example of one student’s six drawings

![Image of six drawings with annotations]

Fourth stage: Once the sequence was concluded, we asked the students three questions: What is the worst of this? What is the best of this? What does this felt sense encourage you to do? This last question ended the process. Finally, for the wrap up, we asked them: Were you able to easily recognize the felt sense? Can you sense if there has been any change in how you’re feeling?
We also took into consideration whether or not they felt that they had been capable of Focusing: We asked:

- if they sensed a felt-shift?
- if they felt that this process was useful?
- if they could see a possibility of carrying whatever new inner-knowings they got forward into their lives. (Feasibility)

**Fifth stage:** We closed the process by encouraging them to protect the experience from the internal critic, and to savour and stay (for a few minutes) with the possible body shift that they might have experienced. Also, we asked them to put one hand on their chest, taking the time to thank themselves for the work they had done during the process.

**Data analysis**

Four trainer-members of The Focusing Institute (in New York) made a qualitative analysis of the students’ responses. In the first two points of the guideline there were three different evaluation levels (from 0 to 2) depending on the number of sensations found/felt and then drawn. For the rest of indications (from the third to the tenth) the evaluation was a yes/no question.

Through common consent, the analysis was expressed/shown only on a chart. The experts evaluated the experiential factor in the narrative and graphic expression of the students’ responses. That is to say, they were looking for how many adolescents experienced a change on any of the three levels observed: graphic, narrative, and experiential.

**RESULTS**

As can be observed in Table 2, 67% of the adolescents knew how to identify one of their disagreeable sensations and 15% knew how to identify two disagreeable sensations, and 72% identified one or two agreeable sensations (62% and 10% respectively). Only 18% of the participants could not identify any bodily sensations, and 28% could not sense any positive sensations.

As far as identifying personal problematic issues, 97% of the students were able to list them, and the same percentage found it easier to identify the worst-of-it (97%) rather than the best-of-it (77%), that is, the positive of what they were Focusing on (77%). 90% said to have felt a certain impulse forward, that is, they felt a body shift due to listening to their felt sense. 95% confirmed having been able to distinguish their felt sense, and 49% of the students stated having experienced changes in their sensations (body shifts).
Table 2: Results from the Guideline-Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Disagreeable sensations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agreeable sensations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. List of issues</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Felt-sense</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 6 drawings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The worst</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The best</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Invitation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Distinguish felt-sense</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Change of process</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall valuation on behalf of the trainers

The trainers then differentiated between students who had experienced a change on the three levels: graphic, narrative and experiential, and those who had not. (Table 3)

Table 3: Overall valuation on behalf of the trainers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION OF STUDENTS’ EXPERIENTIAL CHANGE</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphic, narrative and experiential changes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No changes observed (on the three levels)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non assessable</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated on the graphic, 38% of the students reported experiencing changes on narrative and experiential levels, while 26% did not report such experiencing such changes. Due to inadequate or incomprehensible responses, the trainers were not able to rate 36% of the responses, but that may not mean that there was no change because according to earlier findings in the questionnaire, 49% (19 students) indicated that they had experienced a change. Possibly some of the participants in this group experienced some degree of change but did not express it clearly on the graphic, narrative, and experiential levels.

Of the 19 students who said they felt they had made some progress in their Focusing process, we can confirm that the evaluators found 15 of them (38% of all 39 participants) showed changes on the three levels (graphic, narrative and experiential). The trainers were unable to confirm changes in only 4 of the 19.

CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the first objective: We wanted to find out if adolescents have the ability to comfortably work in a Focusing way while drawing; this study shows that they do. The fact that 95% of the adolescents perceived and experienced the felt-sense, that approximately 50% followed the process with changes, and that 38% of them completed the Focusing process and felt a definite body shift leads us to confirm that adolescents can experience Focusing even though not all of them complete the process. This outcome suggests that paying attention inside requires a certain amount of training and that some participants were able to Focus on their felt sense, but didn’t signify their experience, either verbally or in writing.

As for the second objective: We wanted to find out if the sequenced drawing is a good resource to better understand Focusing; the study shows that 100% of the students could express their felt sense with a drawing. This outcome shows that drawing the felt sense, along with words, allows adolescents to be in a more direct contact with their body.

However, the fact that this was not a controlled study and that all of the students were from the same school, limited the possibility of generalizing the results. In the same way, it is important to take into account the fact that some of the 36% of participants had not handed in enough material or submitted their results in a incomprehensible way. This outcome could be due to the lack of confidence or comprehension of the procedure. All of the above leads us to suggest that we need more and similar studies in a controlled manner in order to find out more specifically the number of adolescents who are able to experience Focusing more directly with sequenced drawings of their felt senses. We also suggest further comparative sequenced drawing studies with adolescents who have not had experiential relaxation, to in order to better understand whether experiential relaxation training should be recommended that adolescents learn how to Focus.
Luis Lopez Gonzalez (Ph.D.) Director of the Master of Relaxation, Meditation and Mindfulness at the University of Barcelona (www.masterremind-ub.org), Director of Programa Treva (Experiential Relaxation Skills at School at the University of Barcelona) (http://www.programatreva.com) Author of various book and articles on Focusing, meditation and spirituality, Focusing Trainer. Email: luislopez@programatreva.com Telephone: (+34) 659 228 620

Carlos González Perez: Psychologist, Trainer & Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapist. Email: carlossenda@gmail.com

Inés Zubeldia: Licensed Psychologist, Individual and Group Therapy: Adults, Youth, Couples and Families, Group Dynamics, Education, TREVA Program Facilitator (http://www.programatreva.com). Email: ines@zubeldia.eu Telephone: (+34) 619 074 071

Txemi Santamaria: Licensed in Psychology and Theology. Psychotherapist. Focusing Trainer. Email: txemisantamaria@hotmail.com

Caroline Copestake: Humanistic Psychotherapist, Bereavement and Trauma Counselor, Trainer in TREVA (http://www.programatreva.com), Focusing Trainer in training. Email: 3delama@gmail.com Telephone: (+34) 639 402 908
“...A felt sense of anything can be invited to come in the body...” — Eugene Gendlin

What can happen when we gather together to create a field of attentive listening for the Earth? A small group of us have been exploring this idea since 2013. In this article, we describe:

History: Personal experiences and conversations that inspired and shaped this process.

Adaptations and Innovations: Ways of directing attention and felt-sensing that we have borrowed or discovered over time.

Challenges: Some of the design challenges that we faced, and some we still are facing.

Actual experiences: A few snippets from sessions that give a small taste of the kinds of experiences that have occurred.

Resources: Online links to some of the material in more depth, to explain and help orient anyone interested in participating in this kind of process.

PRELIMINARY EXPERIENCES

**Eric:** I am in an apartment in New York City, around Christmas. A sudden snowstorm has made exiting the city impossible — all the trains, subways, bridges and buses are shut down. I decide at one point to make a connection with the city — a Therapeutic Touch kind of energy connection, just to see what happens.

The connection felt solid, and a definite feeling came with it. The feeling was unmistakable — “Spanish Pride”. Was I ever surprised! I was not aware that a sense of an entire community could come from a Therapeutic Touch-like energy connection. [As it turns out, I was in a large Spanish neighborhood, but I didn’t discover this until the following day when I left and I was walking to the train station.]

The next day I get to the train station. I am waiting for the train, when a Hispanic woman comes down the steps on another platform. In her arms is a baby crying very loudly and continuously. I still remembered the feeling of Spanish Pride very clearly, so I get the feeling back, make an energy connection with the baby, and send that feeling to her. She stops crying instantly and was quiet the whole time until my train left.

[This occurred about a year before I read the book Focusing by Dr. Gendlin. I knew Focusing would be important to me because, when I first saw the book out of the corner of]
my eye, it appeared two feet tall and a foot wide, just long enough to get me to find the book and buy it.]

Focusing made sense to me as soon as I read about it. I recognized how my earlier “Spanish Pride” feeling would be considered to be a felt sense. And, even before learning about Focusing, I had experienced how a felt sense could be communal as well as individual, and how a felt sense could be shared by Therapeutic Touch-type energy connections...

Bruce: During the 2002 Children Focusing Conference, Marta Stapert invited me to “listen to the voice of her process”, as she sought to articulate her work with babies. As Marta began, she noticed how she was “sensing for the baby.” It was as if a joint felt-sensing system was being created by her attuned listening. In her being with the babies and their felt experience, something would often shift and unfold in a healing way.

After sharing this experience on the Focusing Discussion list, list members considered how Focusing attention might be offered in a similar fashion towards other nonverbal beings, such as animals. From this discussion came: “What if we listened to the Earth in a Focusing way, where her own right next steps can emerge out of a space of caring listening presence? Wouldn’t that be different from the usual approach of “trying to save/fix the planet!”

I loved the idea, wrote a post about it, and even tried listening to the planet a few times. But my solo attempts felt rather abstract and distant, so I stopped.

In 2011, I was excited to read Eric’s posts on the Focusing discussion list, where he described offering attention to others’ felt senses for their healing. He also suggested that offering this kind of attention to world leaders in critical situations might decrease their reactivity, and improve more creative and peaceful outcomes. “If he could connect to others’ fields, and if I could connect to him,” I thought, “then this might work!”

STARTING UP

Through several phone and email exchanges, we explored how to actualize this concept. We began slowly, inviting a few people on the Focusing list who had expressed interest in joining us. Eric suggested that we begin with some preliminary work, so that group members could create some sense of connection with one another. The intention was to create some kind of support and linkage that we could draw upon when sensing into potentially vast and powerful planetary energies.

We continued our preliminary work by gathering together via phone, and attempting to “make an energy connection with each other”. We did so both visually and kinesthetically, sensing each other, “sending a connection” to each other through head or hands, and then checking to see what the others were feeling. Once we had completed this stage successfully, we began sessions in July 2013 with participants from the US, Canada, and Australia. We have now participated in over 40 virtual sessions, in addition to a few live sessions since then. We use this general format:
• An initial check-in. At times, the check-in may include a personal intention for ourselves.

• A lead-in for grounding and making an energy connection with others in the group, followed by an invitation to begin to sense into “What in the world is wanting my/our attention now?” Here is how we usually begin:

“Let’s start with becoming aware of our own presence…Noticing our breathing…

Being aware of our feet on the floor, our bodies on whatever surfaces that are supporting them…

Feeling that support…

Noticing how those surfaces are being supported by the planet, this depth of support and grounding under us, holding every one of us…

Being aware of our bodies—the space within our bodies—the outline of where our bodies meet the world—the energetic experience of our bodies…

Aware of ourselves, also becoming aware of the others in the circle, together…

Allowing ourselves to make an intention to connect energetically with each other, to feel or visualize the others in this virtual circle here, together, in this process…

Feeling how this circle…is one in an ongoing series of circles…of those who came long before us, and of those who will go on long after us…offering care and attention to the earth, to its well-being…

Being aware of our intention to be of service to the planet, and to be listeners, as well, to what wants to emerge…

Connecting with each other, and with our bodies, in a felt way, we offer the invitation: ‘What…in the world…is wanting our attention now?’…

…And we share what comes, into the center of the circle, as we feel moved…”

• As in some forms of Quaker process, we then sit quietly, sense individually, remain open to what comes, and share as we feel moved to do so. Often, there are significant periods of silence.

• Participants are welcome to engage in any of the three phases of Focusing with non-verbal life forms (drawn from the work of Marta Stapert):
  - Creating a shared field of connection through attuned listening. Just being with what is there, holding whatever is there, with the non-verbal being.
  - Listening for what comes, a felt sense of what the non-verbal being may need, and allowing that to be articulated through us.
  - Moving with felt aliveness as we feel called to, in response to what we have heard and how we have been touched.
• As in Focusing, some of what comes may be reflected by another person — as a way of acknowledging what’s there, and also to allow others to resonate with the Focuser’s felt-sense, if they wish to do so.

• In response to a reflection, there may be silence, the same person may say more, or another may share (on the same theme, or on something quite different.) There is no attempt to have us all stay on the same topic.

• At times, a Focusing suggestion may be offered to someone, such as, “You might want to check and see if it feels ok to say ‘hello’ to that…”

• Occasionally, a very different kind of suggestion, something quite novel, may arise and be offered to the group for consideration and for us to try out.

• Nearing the end, we close the circle. Sometimes there is an informal debriefing afterwards.

ADAPTATIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Resonant Sensing for Peace expands the traditional Focusing process in several ways:

• We sense into something outside of our physical bodies that is larger than any of us.

• The process involves group felt-sensing. We are co-sensing and co-resonating. Each of us is listening (to one another and to the planet), and we are also Focusing. Each person’s sensing and resonating touches something different-yet-related in each one of us…

• We strengthen the group container by intentionally making an energy connection with one another at the start, and occasionally checking that connection during a session.

PROCESS AND DESIGN CHALLENGES — PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

As one might imagine, designing and coordinating a process that involves people in multiple locations sensing, offering attention, and communicating together has its challenges.

Logistics. We enjoy having participants from various geographic locations around the earth, in Pacific, Eastern, and Australian time zones. This diversity of time zones makes scheduling quite complicated; we use Doodle or When2meet.com. We try to set session dates to balance participation, as rarely does the entire group have the same time slot free.

Tech platform. We have used Maestro Conferencing, and more recently, Zoom, which adds an additional dimension of allowing some of us to see each other.

Size limitations. We often have 4-5 participants. The process has also worked well with only 2 people present. The largest group we have had has been 10. With an even larger group, it would help to have a way for people to signal when they wanted to share.

Guiding. We are still considering the optimum amount of guiding to offer during sessions. Some of us have found that our current lead-in format, followed by long periods of silence, is not always enough for all of the participants to develop a felt-sense of the Earth. If someone doesn’t experience much, the process will not feel very meaningful to him or her, and so
there has been a natural self-selection among those who continue in the group. This topic merits further consideration.

Reflections. Designating who will offer reflections is not clearly defined, and can be a source of confusion. Up to now, one of the hosts usually does most of the reflecting, but others are welcome to reflect if they feel moved to. In general, we seem to have managed in this manner, but here is another area where more explicit guidelines might be useful to all.

Intensity. So far, we have not found the intensity of the material that arises to be a problem. . . This may be related to the good group connection, which provides support and occasional guidance when someone feels stuck with something. What comes for any individual during this process is seen as their experience, and also as information for the group as a whole. This combination — feeling connected with the group, and not treating whatever comes as ‘purely personal content’ may make it easier for members to be present with what comes.

EXCERPTS FROM TWO DIFFERENT SESSIONS

These notes may offer a taste of the movement and flow of this process. Within each session, we have used p1, p2, etc. to denote a shift in the person who is speaking. Due to length constraints, we have not included here the text of the reflections.

1. Excerpt from of a session with five participants in January 2014:

p1, After some silence: Peace talks in Syria — something wanting to have people stop the violence...feeling discomfort in stomach...Trying to match that reality of great suffering with the great beauty in the world...(longer pause)...When in the suffering, watching the world, it is easy to forget the beauty, get overwhelmed...Wanting to say hello to that place...(p2 reflects)

p1 continues:...Can see the people who have had the courage to even think that these factions could come together...Like a candle in a tsunami...And yet, there is a candle...But it is very small...(longer pause)

p1 continues:...There is the possibility of putting one's hands over our ears, close eyes, and pray...And, a part that has done that, at times, can escape from that, wants to pay no attention to it...(another long pause)...And, there is another part, the heart, very vulnerable, that says, “I must witness…I must watch.”...in a camaraderie for those who suffer — not closing my eyes to what I see, to these people...” (p3 reflects)

p1...It is a beautiful pain...It is utterly alive...And, I treasure it...There is a fierceness to that aliveness...There is a LOT of life there...Noticing two places...An aching in gut, tender, not as twisted now...And something now around the heart, into the throat area...Words coming “An embracing of the whole”...Feeling like our feet are on the ground, when I am really in contact with that...(p4 reflects)

p1 “Count me in!” it says....

p2 (guiding suggestion) Maybe just breathing with all of this for a few moments...
p4 (after a brief pause)...All of a sudden, actually smelling baby powder, very strongly, right here — like a mother’s womb, and babies, coming very powerfully, feels quite amazing...(p3 reflects this, then after a pause, offers their own felt sensing:)

p3...An image of fresh leaves pushed up from a bulb, from beneath the soil and up above into the air...Leaves and growth, surging, growing, wilting and fading, and growing again...leaf and bounty and fruit, then fading...something being born, and being allowed to die...If we only look at a little piece of that process, it appears like a tragedy...(p1 reflects)

p3 continues....If we have the bigger view, we have an expression of something huge...A pulsing, breathing, surging, a pulling back and a pushing up...(p5 reflects)

p2 (after some moments of shared silence)...A deep resonance with “count me in”...going from living ON the planet to living IN the planet...Like the difference between renting, and owning, a house — “this is MY world, a very different feeling...”

p1...getting a sense of “Count me in!” — as in “IN-timacy”...

p2 (after more silence) In preparation in closing the circle, checking if there are any requests for us, from the planet....

p1....“Have courage,” it says...

2. Excerpt from a session with a different set of 7 participants, in Sept 2014:

p1...feeling a strong energy here in this group...calm, peaceful...

Suggesting we treat that energy as if it were a felt sense, and connect with each other, as if we were making a large antenna, one that covers a lot of space...(p3 reflects)

p1...Making a specific intention for us to connect with everyone in the world, from this energy connection that we have as a group...and for that to connect with the place in each individual in the world, that wants peace...(p2 reflects)

p1...Gently holding this intention, in whatever form it takes, to let them feel that something is with them, to reinforce that in them, that they are not all alone in that desire for peace.

p1 (after some silence) Some tension present, as well...Acknowledging that the tension exists, it is not ignored...(p2 reflects )

p1 continues:....the tension exists, and, can co-exist with the part that wants peace (p5 reflects)

p2 (after a pause) A felt image of a circle of people, standing up. Something lifting up...A metaphor of taking a stand, standing up, for peace, in some strong way...Something inspiring...yes...standing up...as people see others standing up for peace, they don’t feel so alone.

p3...Feeling a humming in my body, a movement, connecting, very soft...
Resonant Sensing for Peace: Listening to Our Planetary Being

p4 Resonating with the ‘lifting up’ — an image like The Magic Schoolbus — the bus lifting with us up into space…connecting together…something magical about the adventure…(p7 reflects)

p1 (after a pause)...hearing a dog barking...something about not just connecting with people, but also with everything in the world that wants peace...

p5...resonating with “co-existence”…a desire to co-exist within self, peace in self, then translates into others desiring co-existing, nations co-existing, and also now Creation co-existing...(p2 reflects)

p6 (after a longer pause) feeling a quiet peacefulness when we included animals...appreciating the connecting with the rest of life beyond humans. This feels like an important piece, to peace. (p3 reflects)

p4...Really resonating with the connecting inward, connecting outward, and the link that connects between...

p2 (after a longer pause) Something ripping in chest...stepping into standing up and being counted...Tears are here, almost jubilant tears...not sure who is crying — me, or the planet...a big yes, joining something...”I stand for this…”

p3...acknowledging it, a deeper sense of being part of it, being with it gently...

p1 (after a pause) appreciating what this is like, doing this with the group...

p2 being with the essence of this “standing up”, almost as if something inside is saying “I won’t turn away from you” to the planet, to peace. Not loyalty, but taking responsibility, making a commitment...There is a bonding that is happening...

p7 almost like a holding, saying “Yes, I won’t turn away…”

p2 “I am here with you...for you.” A sense of saying to the planet “Sorry I was such a stranger…I’m back now.” (p4 reflects)

p3...like a deeper homecoming...Here we are, together...

EFFECTS OF THE PROCESS

Participants often report one or more of the following:

• A sense of bodily-held peacefulness.
• A sense of gratitude for participating in something deep, meaningful, and larger than ourselves.
• Feeling more centered in one’s caring towards our Earth and its inhabitants.
• Shifts in how we are holding certain global situations, towards more care and understanding.
• Feeling able to be with difficult global situations in a calmer, stronger, and more centered way.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR RESONANT SENSING FOR PEACE:

An index page at http://serviceoflife.info/planetaryhealing/phindex.html includes:
- Description of one way to explain the process to a new group
- Orientation letter for group participants
- Excerpts from sessions of Resonant Sensing for Peace 2013-2015
- Experiences of Eric’s that have influenced this process
- Notes on Marta Stapert’s process of Focusing with babies
- Focusing and Healing the Planet — (sections 5 and 6 inspired this process)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE FOCUSING COMMUNITY:

The Gaiafield Project http://gaiafield.net/ : “The Gaiafield Project promotes the study and practice of subtle activism, which affirms the power of consciousness-based approaches like global meditation and prayer events to support social and planetary transformation.”

HeartMath Institute www.heartmath.org, researches the connections between heart & brain, human beings, & the Earth. Their work points to ways that the Earth’s fields and human fields interaffect each other.

Their insightful “Interconnectivity of all Living Systems Through Earth’s Magnetic Field,” is available at: https://www.heartmath.org/research/global-coherence/

We invite you to use some of the above resources to develop processes and practices that work for you. Please feel free to contact us with questions or any innovations that are generated from your own experiences.

Best wishes in your explorations!

Eric Lorup discovered the capacity to offer care and healing to others at a distance in an unobtrusive way, and has been doing so for over 30 years. This has expanded through his study of Therapeutic Touch, Focusing and hypnosis. He has a deep interest in raising people’s awareness of their own potential for offering caring to each other though their energetic fields. He lives in NJ, and can be contacted at ericlorup@yahoo.com

Bruce Nayowith, M.D. has been Focusing since 1987 — as a personal practice, and to complement other processes that support the unfolding of individual and systemic potential. These include developmental psychology, whole brain education, Nonviolent Communication, and emergent group processes such as Dynamic Facilitation, Open Dialogue, and Systemic Constellations. He works as an emergency physician, and can be reached at bnayowith@yahoo.com
FOCUSING WITH THE STRESSES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Salvador Moreno-López, Ph.D.

Focusing is more than a technique or a procedure. Focusing implies, among other things, a life philosophy, some attitudes, and a way of being aware. In this paper I explore how Focusing can play an important role in generating care for oneself and for others, and Buen Vivir (Good Living) in everyday situations related to stress and eating.

STRESS IN DAILY LIFE

Quite often, people speak about stress as a problem in daily life. This includes feeling overwhelmed, tense, tired, worried, anxious, moody and irritable, and having difficulty concentrating at work or generating creative ideas, as well as becoming easily frustrated. Stress can also include symptoms of body aches, hypertension, gastritis, insomnia and headaches. We often feel that we can do little to change the causes of stress, which may include day-to-day situations like heavy traffic, bad working conditions, low pay, insecurity on the street and at home, and conflicts with others. And we therefore feel powerless to reduce stress and its negative consequences.

At this point, Focusing offers an alternative way of looking at our everyday situations that can restore our sense of power.

Interaction comes first, says Gendlin (1996). We are beings interacting with others, in specific circumstances, every moment. We affect and are affected simultaneously. He also proposes that a person interacts in each situation according to how s/he feels bodily in that situation. So we can surmise that if we change our body-feeling, our way of experiencing a situation, then we will also be able to change our ways of interaction.

If I’m driving in heavy traffic and I’m thinking, “What a terrible situation, how long will it take to get to my destination, I’m going to be late, it’s hot and what an uncomfortable feeling, I have to be very careful to avoid colliding with the other cars,” etc., chances are I will feel anxious, angry, irritable and very tired at the end of the day.

I can then invite myself to PAUSE and pay attention to my sensations and feelings. To look beyond my thoughts and feelings to identify and recognize what I feel in my body. Where do I feel it? How is it? I do not explain or try to change it. I make a large space so those sensations can have room to be in the body and be recognized.

I can now sense the body differently. There are also changes of mood and feelings. I can express sounds, words, or gestures that arise from these identified sensations. When I do that, I discover that the experiencing is carried forward. I realize I am starting to feel calmer, less tense, and more relaxed; I stop thinking and just see and hear what is on the way.
My way of driving a car changes. The process becomes more fluid and in harmony with the possibilities available for operating a car in these stressful conditions. I stop fighting with others and being defensive. I no longer feel exhausted, helplessly along the route. When I arrive at my destination, I am in a good mood to address whatever I have to do.

Victor Frankl (1978) noted that the values of attitude are suitable in situations where we can do very little to change them. He reminds us that we can always decide in what attitude we live a situation. Focusing shows us specific ways to live these attitudes: to accept what is there, without judging and to show hospitality to our felt-senses. With these attitudes we can generate good alternatives for Buen Vivir in difficult situations.

‘Good Living’, Buen Vivir, points to an ethic of enough for the whole community and not just for the individual. It is a holistic and integrated view of the human being, immersed in the great earthly community, which includes besides humans, air, water, soil, mountains, trees and animals. It is to be in deep communion with the Pachamama (Earth), with the energies of the Universe and God. (Boff, 2009) See Boff’s paper in the References to learn more.

While we must always seek to build adequate conditions for Buen Vivir and change those conditions that are unjust, oppressive or destructive, we must also address the transformation of ourselves to live better every day.

A different situation arises when I find myself repeatedly thinking about particular issues and problems to solve. The disgust I had with a co-worker, the difficulty of the issues to be resolved, the pressure to do more and finish quickly, the fact that money is not enough to cover expenses, the demands of some relatives who ask for help…these thoughts and more come to generate fear and intense concern within me. Suddenly, I find myself trapped in a vicious circle. The situations, thoughts, feelings and behaviors are fed back, causing discomfort, pain and suffering.

Again, I PAUSE to pay attention from my bodily felt sense, and this helps me to find better alternatives for living.

I give myself a few minutes to attend to what overwhelms me. I can do so as I sit somewhere quietly or walk through a park. I look at all of the issues and concerns. I make a list so that none of the issues is left out — and then able to protest at not being recognized! Here they are, all of the issues, in front of me. How does all that feel in my body? I wonder…And I wait for sensations and feelings to arrive. I identify that I feel anxious, worried, scared, angry, tired, unsure, and I recognize these sensations as feelings. I look at them from a distance and try to see if they need my help immediately or if they can wait. If the feelings do not need my help immediately, I move to identify the felt senses related to them and pay attention. Sometimes, I may have to attend to the feelings first.

I am still surprised by how the felt senses change when I pay attention to them, and am reminded about how important it is for me to listen and to care for myself within my body. I recognize that for some cultures, this way of paying attention seems like a weird action. It is understood as doing nothing, a waste of time, being lazy, when the social demand seems
to be “do, do, do and produce” and “work tirelessly because time is money.” When these requirements appear, I pay attention. I wonder...Where does the need to be doing all the time come from? Where does the prohibition to pause and to take some time to care for myself this way come from?

It is important to recognize this social ideology that aims to guide my life in other directions and values. These insights also help me to understand some of the behaviors and attitudes of those who come to learn Focusing. These people feel in conflict with the dominant ideas and values of the cultures in which they live.

Once I attend to and express my felt-senses, a wide, dynamic, complex, and clearer panorama about how I am living these situations unfolds. And even better, a process from which I begin to glimpse new and better alternatives for Buen Vivir is generated.

Focusing shows Body Wisdom (Gendlin, 1996; Moreno, 2009) to be a process and a way to draw on life’s experiences and learnings to guide interactions in the present. However, some of those experiences were not properly processed. They remained partly or completely frozen. This means that the memory of an experience is not clear or distinct, but is confused with other experiences. When this confusion occurs, those improperly processed experiences interfere with an appreciation of the actual present situation and therefore tend to encourage inappropriate responses.

An example: A few years ago I realized that I got too easily angry in my interactions with a colleague. Something seemed out of place about my responses, and I decided to pay attention to how all that felt in my body.

Some sensations came. From these sensations first, an image appears of my colleague. At this point, it is as if I am looking at a printed picture. Suddenly it seems that another picture comes from behind the first one and moves toward the left side — and now there is another picture: my mother.

I was surprised, and at the same time I noticed that something was changing in my body. I felt a relief. I noticed that when I interacted with my colleague, I saw her with images that were of my mother, but inadvertently mixed in with my perception of my colleague. When I made the differentiation of images, my interaction with my colleague was better. It became smoother and friendlier.

This experience was another confirmation to me that the stress that I feel in a situation depends not only on the circumstances, but also on how I live that interaction. And it showed me that if I can change how I feel, I can change what I do, what I say, and what I think. Focusing is a way to change my experiencing and my living daily interactions.

STRESS AROUND EATING

Another aspect of daily life that Focusing can help improve is eating. What do I eat? When and how much do I eat? These are questions that can also be answered by attending to the various felt-senses of all about eating...Paying attention to the body when I eat has been a source of discovery and learning. I identify, for example, three areas of my body to which
I pay attention in relation to eating: mouth, throat and stomach. When I think I am hungry, I observe how each one feels. Usually, I find different sensations that sometimes seem to be in tune with each other and sometimes not. I can feel like eating in the throat, but not in the mouth or the stomach. Or feel hungry in the mouth, but not in the other parts. When I notice these discrepancies, I attend with more care and time to my body in order to discover and understand what is happening and what I really want.

I remember Eva, a 35-year-old overweight woman. She had been struggling to lose some weight with a dietitian’s advice. One of her main difficulties was limiting what she ate. Suddenly she would feel like eating and then eat an entire package of crackers or half a loaf of sliced bread. Afterwards, she felt guilty and disappointed in herself.

Eva learned to PAUSE and look at her body. She knew about paying attention to her mouth, throat and stomach. So one day, walking to the cookies, she suddenly stopped and said: “I’ll stand. How do I feel now?”…Then she found that her feelings were not exactly starving; therefore, she did not need to eat. She realized that she felt anxious and scared. She thought, “This feeling needs my attention in another way.” Then she took a few extra minutes to recognize more clearly what she felt and what she needed in order to satisfy her actual need properly.

When I start eating, I can ask myself, “Am I hungry? Do I feel hungry or do I eat because it is the appointed time?” Sometimes I find I am not really hungry, but I eat because it is “lunch time.” Then when I am eating, Focusing and Mindfulness invite me to pay attention to my sensations and feelings, to notice the texture, flavor, consistency and smell of food. Thus, I realize what I like and what I do not like.

Until recently, I was a fan of desserts. I ate any dessert and in large quantities. Then I became overweight, but it did not matter enough to change my habit. It seemed so delicious to eat all those desserts! When I started to pay attention, I discovered that I really did not like all desserts, and that sometimes I preferred one specific cake and other times I wanted a different one. So I began to change. I always begin with the question, “Do I really want this dessert?” It is now a question to be answered from my body awareness. And then I have to verify whether or not I like that dessert enough to eat it or whether I will leave it.

Another important aspect is to recognize when to stop eating. I learned from an early age to eat everything that was on my plate. I had to finish it; that was the watchword in my family. I did not ask myself whether I was hungry, I simply saw the plate. And if later another dish came, my attitude was, “Go for it!” By eating more slowly and attending to my stomach, I was able to be aware of when I was satisfied, even though there was still food on my plate. I discovered that this new awareness avoided all of the problems and pains resulting from overeating. I could look to my own felt sense to feel when to stop eating.

More than anything, I discovered that I can ask myself about eating, and from my bodyorganism guide and decide what I like, when, and how much. Of course, I find it helpful to learn about nutrition and a balanced diet. I am interested in research findings and the opinions of others about food and eating (Arnaiz & Comelles, 2007).
However, I try to go beyond customs and feeding practices. I think that the most important referent in interacting with food is my experiencing. In this way, I can also give myself the opportunity to experience new foods to find out whether I like them or not, instead of relying only on the recommendations of other people or with other partial information that I have before trying them.

Finally, a word about what we eat. Years ago I stopped eating red meat, pasta, and flour in general. After a month, I realized I had specific hungers. That is, I wanted to eat a tomato or a cucumber, or some other particular food. I remembered a research project reported by Rogers (1969). He cites an experiment in which children were allowed to choose their food within several possibilities for some weeks. It was noted that children ate a balanced diet over time. If one day they omitted some important food, two or three days later they chose that food. A few days ago, after presenting my book about Focusing, a person told me that she was guided by her body to choose her food. Her family thought she might be malnourished. But medical and nutritional checks have found no deficiencies. Hearing what I said on Body Wisdom was meaningful to her. She thought that maybe her Body Wisdom could guide her on the right path about what to eat. She felt more relaxed and confident in her process.

Currently, it seems wise to also attend to the fact that some substances that we ingest, such as canned or industrialized food, may have some negative influences on our health. These awarenesses come from our Body Wisdom which can guide us in choosing the optimal quality and quantity of our meals.

Attending to experiencing, taking into account our felt senses, and guiding our interactions with food from conscious body awareness are Focusing contributions to eating in a healthy and nutritious manner. Through this inner guidance, we promote our health.

CONCLUSION

Focusing in daily life has become a means of promoting Buen Vivir and has helped me to recognize myself as being an author, agent and actor of my living (Zubiri, 1986/1998). The circumstances of life are complex and often difficult. Paying attention to my bodyorganism and trusting the process of experiencing, I can guide my living by paths that take care of me, others, and the environment. Without ignoring the need to take action to transform our surroundings and life circumstances, and to care for nature and human beings, we may at the same time receive guidance in our daily interactions through our Body Wisdom.

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Salvador Moreno-Lopez, Ph.D. is a Mexican psychologist. He has been orienting his professional practice with Focusing since the 1980’s. He works as a consultant, psychotherapist, group facilitator and university professor. Salvador has written the book, Descubriendo mi Sabiduría Corporal. Focusing, and several articles related to Focusing. Website: www.focusingmexico.mx Email: smorenol@focusingmexico.mx Cell phone: +52-33-3157-7866

REFERENCES


Dear Felt Sense,

I have been meaning to write to you for some time now. I’ve known that I have had gratitude that I have wanted to express to you. “Gratitude” is not quite right. It’s close, but the word “gratitude” doesn’t say it deeply enough. I want to try to put into words what you’ve meant to me. (When I say that some tears come to my eyes.)

The contribution that you have made to what is good in my life, and to what I have done with the events and situations that I wish had never happened to me, has been huge. That’s close to what brings my tears now. That…and a sense of an ocean-wave-like strength that I feel in my chest now, and that I have experienced in some of the most trying and painful times in my life, is what brings this eye moistening. Thank you.

You and I go back about fifteen years now. Like many of your friends I was introduced to you at a difficult time in my life, a time when I felt determined to heal from some difficult feelings that had stayed stuck within me for decades. You may notice that I said heal “from” difficult feelings. However, after knowing you all these many years, I would now say, “heal through these difficult feelings that had stayed stuck within me for so many years.”

So I, the therapist, sought out therapy...again. At various points in the process, my therapist guided my attention to my body as I experienced it from the inside. Those instructions seemed strange to me. I was used to speaking from my thoughts or speaking about my feelings. This was different. And the process brought with it surprising insights that I could sense in my body, that I could actually feel like I was holding. No...that was not it. It was more like...surprising insights that I actually felt IN my BODY that brought with them a kind of easing and vitality. My therapist could see my head-shaking-what-was-that-kind of appreciation and said: “What you just did is called Focusing. If you want to learn more, talk to Christel Kraft.”

I did, and that marked the beginning of what has become a central friendship in my life — a friendship with you. You weren’t always easy to get in touch with. I often had to connect with you by going through difficult feelings, clear and hard to describe. I had to step aside from my usual analytic approach to my inner life so I could touch into what I was feeling in my body about some situation or relationship.

In the beginning being friends with you disoriented and confused me in ways that I deeply valued because as disoriented as I felt, some small feelings of being whole were coming to me from whenever we spent time together. I remember saying to Christel, when we were talking about my times with you and the effects Focusing was having on my life and my work, “I don’t know what a head is for any more.” (I’m a little clearer about that now.)
Through our friendship every aspect of my life grew, deepened and expanded, and at times got shook up. My life and work as a therapist changed profoundly — as did my marriage, my parenthood, my friendships, and my relationship to prayer — and my Jewish self.

Being friends with you in those first five years meant many early morning visits together with you, showing me the Focusing attitude, accompanying me to painful places and times in my past, and teaching me when I asked — one encounter at a time — what those places that lived in my body needed...from life, from others, and from me. There were so many tears that were shed in those numerous early morning visits together — sometimes sobbing tears of great sorrow, sometimes tears of relief as I heard myself. Sometimes there were tears of laughter. And always, despite the pain of those journeys you took me on, I came back feeling more whole, more me, more alive and more expansive. Although I didn’t think of it in those terms, then, I now realize that our time together helped me to experience the transformation of OY (misery) to JOY.

I remember a colleague/friend, who knew that I was practicing Focusing, saying that I seemed different somehow, more relaxed. After checking in with you, I told him that “relaxed” wasn’t quite it. Rather I felt “more comfortably uncomfortable.” That’s what JOY meant to me in those early days of knowing you. JOY, then for me, meant feeling more whole, larger somehow, and experiencing what Gene Gendlin, who introduced you to the world, called Life Forward Energy. This experience of JOY would happen over and over and again and little by little by little...the sense of being me, felt easier and more vital.

Being friends with you also brought me to other friends of yours: more teachers and students of yours, and to a lengthy and beloved Focusing partnership in which my partner and I (like others in partnerships all around the world) would, by deeply listening to each other, help you to make contact with us. This listening partnership allowed us to sense and articulate your often hard to discern message. Some of your friends became my friends — because we had you in common.

The point of departure for finding you was usually a painful emotion or body sensation about some situation. But I came to trust that the journey through the doorway of pain could lead to you, and that through various Focusing approaches to interacting with you, healing and insight could happen. I had come to trust what I call — the OY-to-JOY cycle — both personally and professionally. I, like, so many of your friends, experienced and trusted the truth of Leonard Cohen’s oft quoted line: “There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

This trust served as preparation for me nearly eleven years later when a series of severe hardships hit my family’s life. The most catastrophic was when my wife went into septic shock and for four days was in a coma. The doctors had predicted that my wife had a twenty percent chance of surviving. Friends and members of our synagogue community gathered together in the family-waiting-room of the intensive care unit to be with me, our sons, my wife’s parents, and sisters. On the second night of the vigil, I recall speaking to a dear friend, and I heard myself say, “Whatever happens this OY can turn to JOY.”

This statement was not mere optimism. I didn’t know what would happen. I had no idea about whether she would pull through or not. (She did). But because of what I had
experienced over and over again from years of finding spending time with you and the healing energies and wisdom you brought to me via Focusing, I just trusted. I trusted that whatever happened — and whatever difficult emotions would arise from whatever happened — some precious life forward energy and steps with meaning would come, and that somehow you and I...I and we would come through it all “better not bitter”. For that, I say: Thank You! Thank You! Maybe that is what the Joy that comes through engaging events, challenges, losses, (translation: OY) in a Focusing way, means to me. That’s close but not quite it. Give me a moment here...Closer for me is that JOY is the emergence of a sense of a fullness, (even an aching, heart scarred and frightened fullness sometimes), and an alive knowing that I and life have something to offer FROM that fullness. Yes. That’s it. JOY.

Over the past few years there have been serious consequences from my wife’s illness. Spending the time to get in touch with you continues to bring me insight and a vulnerable strength that helps me to make difficult adjustments.

There have been other hard times, as well. That includes my own health crisis two years ago. I have counted on my friendship with you. During momentary pauses, which I refer to as inner google searches, I find you. During longer solo Focusing sessions, I find you. And I know I will need to look for and find you in the years to come because there will always be challenges and stuck places that are, as Gene says, “between me and feeling all OK.” OY! And I trust that you will be there to nourish my other sources of nourishment — relationships, community, my work and received wisdom, so that I may experience the many hues of joy.

Thank you!

Steve Moscovitch

Steve Moscovitch, M.S.W., R.S.W. lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He has been a Certified Focusing Professional since 2002 and has a full time counselling and therapy practice with individuals, couples and families. He can be reached at: smoscovitch@hotmail.com or via his website: stevemoscovitchtherapy.com. He is currently working on a book exploring what he calls the Oy to Joy cycle.
EXPERIENCING PHILOSOPHY

Anna Willman, MA

I am not a philosopher. But I love ideas, especially what I call “big picture” ideas — ideas that transform my understanding of the world in some way. So a few years ago, I signed up for Neil Dunaetz’s telephone class on Eugene Gendlin’s philosophy, and for the next year and a half struggled through A Process Model, five pages per week.

It wasn’t easy. I read through each five-page segment three times before our weekly phone meeting, at which point we spent two full hours reading and discussing the pages. Those of you who have studied Gendlin’s work know that it is comprehensive, dense with meaning, carefully — precisely — worded, and frankly mind-boggling in content. There were moments when I found myself asking, “Who is this guy? What kind of mind comes up with this weird stuff?”

And then there were those moments when it all came together for me, and my world shifted. I felt almost high with delight — like a kid in a candy store.

I was amazed by how Gendlin’s philosophy made immediate and profound differences in how I experience everything I see and do. Where before I had seen a dog, a field, a window, a road, now I saw complex interactions and possibilities. I saw life nourishing life, environments shifting, a planet turning. And I understood that I was a part of this.

It is not the purpose of this essay to summarize or explain Gendlin’s philosophy of the implicit. Rather I want to share with you the impact it has had on my daily experiencing of my life.

I have gone through as rich and profound a transformation as when I first learned Focusing.

Some of you may know that on my seventieth birthday I began an adventure — an attempt to fulfill a “bucket list” dream of walking across the United States. I started at the beach in Florence, Oregon and am now somewhere in southern Idaho. I go out for two or three weeks at a time in a little camper trailer with a travel companion who delivers me out on the road each day and picks me up when I am done.

I’m old and fat and arthritic, so I walk slowly with my grandfather’s old wooden cane and walk for a limited time each day. My goal is Atlantic City, New Jersey. I might make it by the time I turn eighty. I might not make it at all.

Whatever the result, I am having a wonderful time. The old bones creak, the summer sun slows my steps, the early morning breeze enlivens me. I stop frequently to take pictures — often just an excuse to pause in order to catch my breath. I struggle to recollect names of wildflowers encountered along the way. I sing to cows, who line up in their field and stare at me with lively interest. I have conversations with earthworms crossing a rain-slicked
highway. I keep a lookout for rocks — the right height and shape to sit upon. I wave at the passing cars and the people in them wave back at me. Sweat slides down my forehead and runs into my eyes. I pause to luxuriate in the shade of a leafy tree. I stumble the last few steps to the car where my travel companion waits for me. I collapse onto the car seat. I laugh out loud for the sheer joy and insanity of my adventure.

I would have done all of these things before reading Gendlin’s philosophy. But now, my experiencing of these things occurs on a deeper level. I’m not just a person on a linear quest, walking from one point on a map to another. I am in a process. I am myself processing.

ENVIRONMENT

I’m not just an isolate being moving about in space, interacting with a separate environment. I am an integral part of my environment: In process with everything about me. As I am living and walking and breathing, I am creating and recreating my environment. I am myself the environment.

Just the experience of walking down the road, step after step is an interaction between foot and road. Not two separate things, but a single process, an interaction that was implied before it even began, the shape and muscles of the foot implying the interaction, implying the ground. The ground equally implying the foot, or something like it, in order for movement to be possible.

I feel the way the road supports me and meets my foot with the same energy my foot applies to it. I feel the way my gait changes when the road is banked, when there is loose gravel on it, when it is slippery with wet leaves, when there are puddles too big to circumvent. When I step gingerly, the road meets my foot gingerly, when I am stepping confidently and firmly, the road is equally confident. I use a cane when I walk and my arm and elbow notice the same process, meeting the road (interacting with the road) more firmly when my arthritis is acting up than when it is not.

Because of Gendlin’s philosophy, I can sense myself being of and in and intrinsic to the environment I am moving through. The cold sends shivers down my spine, the rain drips into my eyes, the mosquitoes feast on my blood. When I breathe the air, I am aware of an exchange of gases. I nurture the green plants with carbon dioxide essential for photosynthesis and receive their life-giving oxygen in return.

My fellow humans contribute as well. Of course they are breathing, like me, but there are also innumerable interactions through which we enrich and affect each other’s experiencing. We wave at each other — fellow travelers on the road. Careless cars cause me to jump, boys riding their bicycles backwards make me smile. I tremble with delicious terror while creeping through a tunnel, hugging the walls as trucks rumble past me. We are all part of each other’s environment.
IMPLYING

My walking also embodies the essence of the implicit. Because I’m experiencing myself as a being in process, each step implies the next one. There is a forwardness, an ongoingness about my walking. Even when I pause for breath, the next steps are implied by the very concept of pause.

Before reading Gendlin, I understood the concept of life being full of possibilities. But now I find myself vividly aware of the constantly shifting possibilities implicit in each moment. I could go this way or that. I could fall into a ditch and break my leg. I could meet someone and have a conversation that might change my life, or hers, or both of our lives. I could save an earthworm’s life, entertain a cow. I pass mysterious roads going off to the side and wonder what might happen if I chose to walk up them. Unlike Robert Frost, I tend to stick to the more traveled highway. This is a quest after all, and there are thousands of miles ahead.

Multiple possibilities await me as I move forward. I may complete my journey, I may become too arthritic to continue, I may get sidelined somewhere along the way. Some of these things will happen, will become explicit as I move forward, and each moment, each new step brings a fresh array of possibilities.

One might say that anything could happen, but of course not anything. Only that which is implicit in where and how I find myself at any given moment. Only that which can happen will happen. I won’t, for example, suddenly start to fly, though my heart might soar at a splendid view. But Gendlin’s philosophy has opened my eyes to all that could happen in a way that wasn’t there for me before. He has given me a way of thinking about the world I am walking through, a new way of experiencing my being in and of it.

And the role of the implicit is bigger than just that. I am also experiencing what actually does occur in a new way because of what might have occurred but didn’t. The path not taken, the very possibility of that path, affects my experiencing of the path taken. This is a version of Robert Frost’s “And that has made all the difference”. He would not have been conscious of that difference if there had been no alternative road to the one he took. And in Gendlin’s world, I am continuously aware of not taking of a multitude of implicit paths.

EV-EVING

My walk also embodies Gendlin’s concept of ev-eving — “everything affected by everything.” How my walk goes on a particular day is affected by the interactions of many things — the weather, of course, and the condition of the road (especially how wide a shoulder it has), but also whether I am wearing the shoes that are springy or the ones that are feather light and make me feel like I am walking barefoot. And how I am feeling, whether I have a cold, or whether I am just one day away from having passed a kidney stone and am giddy with the absence of pain.

Figure in, also, the terrain — a mountain pass or a valley filled with orchards. Uphill or down, or level, or all of the above. An urban setting filled with busy people, or a vast and
empty desert — just rocks and sagebrush for company. I find that whether I’m alone on the road or have a walking companion makes a huge difference. I might say my mood on a given day is a factor, but I find that just the simple act of walking lifts my mood, makes me happy. So the walking itself affects my experiencing of everything — me creating my own environment — affecting me as a part of that environment.

So many things to shape my experience...Did I wear enough layers to keep out the cold, or did I put on too much? How much time do I still have before my travel companion comes to check on me? Is there an obvious goal for the day that makes me a bit more determined as I walk? Something like a mountain pass a few miles ahead, or small country store where I can buy an ice cream bar on a hot summer afternoon. What did I eat for breakfast and how fast is it working its way through my body and where oh where is there a place around here to go to the bathroom without flashing all those passing cars?

This long list is just the beginning of ev-eving. For all of these things don’t just affect my walk, they also affect each other. And how they affect each other changes how they affect my walking process.

For example, suppose a truck has pulled off the highway and then re-entered traffic spraying gravel across the paved shoulder of the road. If I am wearing my barefoot shoes, I feel each pebble. It is not painful, but annoying, so I step carefully to avoid the pebbles, slowing my pace, maybe enough to prevent my reaching the country store that day for my ice cream bar reward. But if I put on my bouncy shoes instead that morning, I scarcely notice the gravel unless one very tiny shard of pebble gets caught in the tread of my shoe. Then I have to find a place to sit down and a sharp twig to use to pry out the sliver of rock. And maybe miss out on my ice cream bar.

And of course, my walking, too, affects everything I have mentioned, sometimes making just a minuscule difference, like displacing the twig I used to remove the pebble, but perhaps also potentially saving a life. (Think of an earthworm gently transported to safety.) And when it affects them, they in turn affect me differently. The persistent earthworm who repeatedly resumes his fatal course across the wet highway, for example, can delay my progress. Or I may defer to his earthwormy instincts and let him go on his way as I go on mine. And that may dampen my spirits more than the chill of rain.

Because ev-eving is so complex, I find that just by putting these few aspects into words, I have restricted the concept, which is much larger, much more all-encompassing than an explicit listing like this would suggest. That which is implicit is always larger, more subtle, more alive and more filled with nuance than that which has become explicit. On the other hand, once something actually occurs, there is always a whole new complex range of possibilities for the implicit — the next step forward.

STOPPED PROCESSES

And then there are the stopped processes. Just as walking suddenly stops if the ground goes away and the walker finds himself sinking into quicksand or thrashing around in water — my walk across the country comes to a halt when I encounter difficulties. Gendlin’s
philosophy allows me to experience my own stopped process differently. Gendlin sees stopped processes as points where either the process ends permanently (an animal dies when its food source disappears), or a fresh, new thing happens so that it can resume differently (the animal discovers a different food source).

I started out from a stopped process. My age, my weight, my arthritis made a cross-continental walk seem impossible. I had given up on my fantasy of walking across the country. Then, following Gendlin’s logic, I found a “new way” to go forward. I increased my arthritis medication and exchanged my crutches for an old wooden cane. I gave it a try and the walking itself seemed to improve the functioning of my knees.

New problems arise that could stop the process of my walk — and do. So I look for that new way. After one embarrassing incident where I literally got caught with my pants down around my ankles, I had to accept that my knees were not up to squatting. I was okay if there was a small tree to hold onto, or a sturdy fence post, but I was approaching a desert area where there were no trees at all and nothing but barbed wire lining the highway.

I thought that problem might do me in (me and my aging bladder). Then a friend made a suggestion and I found a place online that sells little cardboard funnels. My process resumed differently, freshly new, with a “paper penis” tucked in my pocket.

My most frequent stoppage occurs when someone who has agreed to come out with me as a travel companion cancels at the last minute. Sometimes I quickly find a replacement. Sometimes I don’t, and then I sit at home in good walking weather, frustrated and a bit irritable. And irritability, too, becomes a part of my process as it goads me to search for new solutions.

I tried driving myself and walking out and then back to my car. That “fresh” new effort lasted just one day. It didn’t take me long to understood that I haven’t enough time or energy left in my life to walk twice across the United States. I could hitchhike back to my car, but so far I haven’t mustered the courage for that.

I’ve tried recruiting people locally through state employment offices, but the bureaucrats don’t consider driving me to and from the highway a job worthy of listing. I make a point of telling at least one person every day what I am doing, hoping that word of mouth will enlist travel companions. After all, it’s an all-expenses-paid vacation. I walk in the morning and we play all afternoon — go sightseeing, visit the local swimming hole, lay around in the sun with a book. My next companion is a writer, who views the trip as a writer’s retreat.

I’m not giving up. Where before I might have struggled with tedious “logistical” problems, now I see my stopped processes as an opportunity to find a something new. I may reach a point where I can’t find a new way forward. But not yet. So my adventure continues.

EXPERIENCING PHILOSOPHY

I cannot say that my understanding of A Process Model is complete or always accurate. I can say that I am experiencing my walk — and my life — differently. Focusing helped
me to live more in the moment, but now my attention goes to the ongoing process of each moment, feeling the dynamic of my living as it is occurring.

And the coolest thing? I find myself relishing the unfolding of my life, living it more richly, experiencing it always freshly, because of Gendlin’s philosophy.

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Anna Willman, MA has been a certified Focusing Trainer since 1982, Anna has two Master’s degrees — from Claremont Graduate School and Columbia University. She retired in 2008 after fourteen years as director of the Confidence Clinic, a community wellness program for women. She has written extensively about that program’s history, philosophy, and practice. She has published five novels, including Kaleidoscope which is about Focusing-oriented Therapy. You can read her blog about her adventures on the road at www.vawillman.webs.com or contact her at vawillman@gmail.com.