

FOCUSING INSIDE IS ALIVE AND WELL IN PUBLIC SCHOOL 161 IN HARLEM:

A Visit with Jan Rudd *By DIONIS GRIFFIN, Focusing Trainer, North Carolina, USA*

Jan Rudd was hired nine years ago as an art teacher in a Harlem public school, where the administration fully supports the arts as a means of educating the whole child. When she started a drama class in 2002, she began using exercises to stretch the children's imaginations, like asking them to be a giant, a dog, or a mouse. This led to Focusing inside, asking "How does your body feel?" and "Where in your body do you feel that?" One girl said she wanted to be a cocker spaniel because she imagined being paraded around in dog shows by her owner and that made her feel proud and taken care of. Another child said he wanted to be a pit bull because he wanted to be rich.

A few years ago, after Jan certified with the Focusing Institute as a Focusing trainer, she approached her school's administration with a request to teach "Focusing Inside" almost as a separate curriculum. She had gained the administration's trust so they let her have free rein.

What does her program look like now? As director of the Arts Program, Jan finds her day taken up in part by administrative details, but she enjoys holding many one-on-one Focusing sessions with students or teaching Focusing to entire classes when invited to do so by the teachers. Out of the school's total of 900 students, 100 have now experienced Focusing

I was invited to attend a fifth grade class that Jan was teaching. However, I arrived early so I was also invited to attend a first grade music class. The music teacher, who was not a Focuser, had arranged the 20 or so children cross-legged on a colorful mat, and they sang to her guitar or engaged in a simple folk dance. A lot of her time was spent lecturing them about not speaking out of turn and not touching each other (which was difficult with 20 children squeezed onto a mat). Apparently they were more wiggly than usual. One child sat on the side and refused to participate, two or three were sullen and slow to respond, several were a bit wild--about what one might expect from a group of first graders.

I thought, isn't it hard, maybe impossible, to control a group of 20 children for an hour?



*Jan Rudd is a Focusing Trainer in New York City.
She can be reached at ps161music@yahoo.com*

It was quite a contrast from the fifth grade Focusing class. Jan chose to ignore the interruptions when children spoke out of turn, or the class phone rang (the teacher answered). Children were told that they did not need to participate and were allowed to exit at will to go to the bathroom or get a drink (presumably with teacher permission). One disruption Jan did not ignore--two boys who talked and giggled with each other non-stop. First, she gently reminded the boys of the respect that they needed to show for others. Later, she asked them if they needed to change seats or if could they control themselves. I realized that she was encouraging them to correct their own behavior. Finally, she asked them again if they wished to separate. Apparently, another student at the same table had had enough. She went to sit elsewhere and for some reason this took care of the problem.

Changing where they sat was the method used by both classes to control student disruptions. The first graders were told when to move and where. The fifth graders were allowed to decide for themselves, and in fact did get up and move at various times.

How much experience with Focusing did these children have already? About 8 of them had worked with Jan one-on-one; 10 or so had worked with Jan in a group, but at least 8 had never had this type of experience. The ethnic background of the children was half Hispanic and half Afro-American. The emotional needs of some were great.

Jan had been allotted a long two-hour time slot. Her instructions outlined 3 main activities: first, a relaxing, body-awareness exercise which included clearing a space, then a sharing time when all 20 students had a chance to describe what they had imagined, and finally, a time for coloring and drawing what they felt inside.

For the body-awareness exercise, Jan asked the students to clear their desks and get comfortable. Some put their heads down on their desk, others stared into space. Then she turned off the lights and began her coaching. "Just notice how it feels to let the chair support you . . . there's nothing you have to do . . . lots of people tell you what to do all day long . . . this time you don't even have to participate if you don't want to."

An observer looking around the room might feel that some children were asleep; others, staring into space, seemed bored. But Jan, with expert, practiced timing, allowed time to elapse between her instructions and the children's compliance. She seemed to have complete faith that something was going on inside them.

"Now imagine a color in the space inside . . . a color that is just right for you . . . let it be just what your body needs . . . imagine it filling up your feet . . . your legs . . . your torso. Now bring some concern or problem back into your body. What does it feel like? Maybe a picture goes with that? A texture? Maybe the color changes."

Next, the children shared what color they had "seen." One young man said that blue had changed to grey as he remembered his grandfather's death. Grey was his grandfather's favorite color. It was "good to be with that." Perhaps inspired by this boy's memory, several other young people talked about deaths in the family. "I saw a flower on my uncle's grave, and the lily was alive." In looking around the room, an observer could see some smirks and giggling and might wonder if some children were "in it" at all. But Jan, unperturbed, continued, often reflecting back what the children had said, adding, "How does it feel to be with that?" "Can you be with that in your body?" She wanted everyone to have a turn. "Has anyone not said anything yet?" All this sharing took over half an hour, and the children were growing restless.

Jan asked the children to name some feelings which she wrote on the board. “Is *mean* a feeling? Maybe not. Excited? Yes. Depressed? Well, we’ve all felt some of that, and it can hurt.” Finally, the crayons and paper were handed out. Five minutes later, most of the pages were still blank. Were they understanding? Were they going to draw? “Use crayons,” Jan said, “We want color.” But a lot of the children started with pencils. One boy simply wrote his name with puffy letters. Another colored a typical green grass and yellow sun with little girl playing. A third drew himself with his head down on the desk, thought bubbles floating up, thinking of himself skateboarding. These drawings seemed nice but about what one might expect from children who have a fairly serene agenda.

Then there was the little boy who had seen stars during his quiet time; they had meant something surprising and exciting to him. His drawing captured some of that excitement. “There is a circle here opening up into something.”

Another drew his safe space. Over the trees and a picture of himself was a blue arch, protecting him. “This is a safe place in my imagination,” he said.

One little girl drew her uncle’s grave and lots and lots of green sunny grass. “He is watching over me,” she said, “but I feel sad that he died.”

One, who had experienced black and red and the feeling of hatred and revenge, drew a powerful picture with thick black lines surrounding a red heart. Another drew a yellow ball on a serene blue background, but covered with a web of wiggly red lines. She wrote the word, “heartbroken.” Then she added two heavy black stones on either side, pressing in on her, and two black tears falling. It was indeed a heartbreaking picture.

“It feels good getting this out on paper,” was one comment, hopefully echoing the feelings of the group. Another told me, “I can draw better than this, but I’m drawing feelings.” The two hours were up, and there wasn’t time for them to share their pictures with the class. But Jan had circulated the room during the half hour, talking most especially to those who had deeper issues. Everyone, including the little boy who had sat silently in front of his blank paper for most of the class, had drawn something. Some finished early and took out a book to read--something the teacher had probably established as normal classroom behavior.

“You may take your picture home, or I will keep it for you in a folder,” Jan said. The heartbroken picture stayed at school.

“It’s amazing how, when you listen to what they say, the children share so much,” Jan told me. “One girl was acting out at school, exhibiting difficult behavior. When I listened to her in a Focusing way, I found out why. Some of these children carry heavy burdens.” Focusing Inside strengthens their ability to carry them. “One fourth grader began to write amazing poetry. When asked how she did it, she said, “I focus inside, and then I write down the pictures and feelings that come to me.” Some months later, she stopped writing poems “I don’t have to get it out any more,” she explained. The issue at home had been resolved.

The children are quite amazing. The space between their conscious and unconscious mind is small so they are able to access images, memories, or distinct safe places much more quickly than adults. When the boys and girls were asked how Focusing was helping them, most of them said that it helped with aggression. such as when they were about to hit their younger brother or sisters, they were able to take their anger into their safe place. One of the boys said that when he saw his

big brother beating up his little brother, rather than hit his big brother out of anger he was able to get into his own body because of his Focusing experience and feel what it was like and talk to his brother instead. This made him more effective in stopping his big brother from further hitting. Another boy said, that when he was very sad, he went into Focusing where he grew wings and could fly into his "happy place" on the beach. One little girl said that she would go into the Focusing state and focus all night.

Jan's future plans include starting a Focusing Club this year with students who are experienced Focusers, plus the two classroom teachers who wish to implement the Focusing attitude in their classrooms. She anticipates that these students and teachers will become proficient as Focusing companions. Then they will be on hand throughout the week to focus with those who need it, and the availability of Focusing at the school will be multiplied.



MY PRE-SCHOOL CLASS

By **LAURA BAVALICS**, *Focusing Trainer, Hungary*

In the winter of 2009, while living in Chicago, USA, I planned a preschool project to teach Focusing to children, and in this way to teach Focusing to teachers. But coming into a preschool with such an idea wasn't as easy as I thought.

Out of four teachers at a preschool in Chicago, only one teacher stepped up and welcomed Focusing to her class. She commented that it was nice that I had my quiet ways because she felt she was the opposite! I visited her class of 11 to 14 three-year-olds once a week for four weeks, staying about a half hour each time.

Another class with three-year-olds I got to visit only once. The teacher said, "Focusing doesn't fit with these children; they don't focus." She thought that Focusing meant to concentrate, to sit quietly and answer my questions.

I would like to share with you the four sessions in this one class. I began each session with a short lead-in, having the children touch their toes, their head, their nose, etc., and then sit in their safe place. I always had a 'magic bag' with me to create interest. The teacher participated with them; that was one of my requests from the beginning. Finally, my 4-year-old daughter came with me, and as she is familiar with the exercises, she provided a comfortable model for the children.

FIRST SESSION

Goals To create an example of how children can express their feelings through drawing.

To create a safe, welcoming place, where children can pay attention to their inside space.

To create a safe place where they can talk about their picture.

Activity

Welcome the children.



Laura Bavalics is a Focusing Trainer in Hungary and corresponds frequently in English. Her email is laurabav@sbcglobal.net.

Talk about our feelings and how we feel different things in our bodies.

Spend story time with the book, *My Many Colored Day*.

Invite children to draw. "What kind of color is your day?"

Visit with children who want to talk about their drawings.

Thoughts After Class

Children were curious and motivated to draw.

Children without much vocabulary could still express themselves.

Children were excited to show and talk about their pictures.

After my instruction, the teacher said, "Miss Laura asked you to think about what kind of color is your day." Then I said, "Maybe it would help to put your hand on your tummy, take a deep breath and feel what kind of color is your day."

Several children drew a house or the sun, like what they draw for school. That's why it's important to explain that this drawing is different because it comes from feelings. It could be anything.

At sharing time, some children were able to talk about the color of their day. Others said, "It's a house." Here is where listening and mirroring are so important. I could say, "Hmm, hmm, it's a house. Maybe this house is important for you. Is there a place for this house inside you? Maybe there is somewhere in your body a place (slow caressing motion in front of child's body without touching it) where you feel this house?"

The sharing time in a circle didn't work very well, because the children wanted to all talk at once. It would be better for me to sit in a corner and invite a child over one at a time, so I can ask "What does this picture have to say?" along with the gentle Focusing question, "Where in your body do you feel that?"

SECOND SESSION:

Goals To play an easy game of touch, look and smell and interact with children in a Focusing way.

To share an example of how Focusing can become a process, and how a Felt Sense can open up into something, such as a body-feeling, an image, a memory.

To create and welcome the "safe place" inside, where they can pay attention to themselves and express their feelings.

Activity

Turn our attention to our bodies. Pay attention to how it is and find a safe, warm place inside.

Play the "What does our body tell us" game (touch, look, and smell). We used cinnamon to smell, a shell to touch, a painting from Chagall to look at.

Thoughts after Class

Children were interested and curious.

Children were an active part of the game.

Some of the responses: "Ouch, it poked my hand," "It doesn't hurt me," and a little girl talked about how the smell of cinnamon evoked a memory of her dad bringing her cookies. She got excited, as she took the time to put the sensation and the memory together.

I found that this class was a clear example of how young children can share with us their Focusing moments, and how close they are to this process.

The sharing time worked better in this class, since the activity was more interactive, and the

children were interested in listening to the other children's reactions

When I used a quiet voice, they became more quiet.

Different things were important for different children, but the sense of smell moved everyone.

THIRD SESSION

Goals To introduce the "Elevator" to invite children to share their feelings and their felt senses.

To introduce the "Elevator" as easy "transportation" into our body's inner senses.

To create a safe, welcoming place for our process.

Activity

Pretend we are an elevator. (We rise up, sink down, go, stop, open the door.)

Pretend we are in an elevator. (We control our elevator by pressing the buttons.)

Draw our own elevator, what it looks like as we travel in it, up and down our body.

Thoughts after class

Children enjoyed the elevator activity; it helped them understand the process better.

They were happy to talk about their own drawing and their elevators.

Since it is difficult to talk about drawings in a group, and since the drawing activity does not take long at this age, children could move to other classroom activities, while I took time to listen to children one by one, spending a little time with each.

In another preschool class, I used a tape recorder so that the children could listen to themselves played back.

FOURTH SESSION

Goals: To find a safe place, a "nest" inside.

To invite our bodies to tell us more about ourselves.

To show an example of a Focusing activity.

Activity

Turn our attention to the inside and our inner "nest." Discover how it feels.

Use body-shapes cut out of regular-size paper and suggest questions like, "Where is your nest?" "Where did your body get hurt?" "Which part of your body do you love the most?" "Which part don't you like?" "Which part is the strongest?"

Put a little sign on it, color it or draw on it.

Share in a circle.

Thoughts after class

Children were actively involved coloring and drawing.

The picture (handle) of a "nest" helped them to settle inside.

They all found their nest quickly and easily.

Children felt comfortable doing what felt right for them (such as coloring the whole body, or just drawing inside it). Nobody asked, "What am I supposed to do?"

One girl said, "My safe place is at home, and I close the door. I feel it here (in tummy)."

The plan was that I meet with the teacher to talk about the experience after it was over and to have her fill out a questionnaire. However, she was always busy with things to do, so this never happened. I felt as if my idea, my "plant," had almost died.

Now I have taken my "plant" back home to Budapest where I am working as an early childhood educator and using Focusing in my class every day. I also have a chance to introduce Focusing to

the teachers in my school, including some college interns who are taking the idea back to the college! So my plant is now having a chance to bloom, even to flower.



AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM: THE INSIDE SPACE EXPLORERS CLUB

By *MINDA NOVEK, Focusing Trainer, New York, USA*

I have taught Focusing to adults and taught writing and art to kids in the public schools. Hoping to combine these two skills and to introduce Focusing to children through the Arts, I contacted Kiki Schaeffer, a Focusing trainer who heads the Parenting and Family Center at the 14th Street YMCA in Manhattan. She is an enthusiastic proponent of Focusing, but her Family Center serves very young kids, and my goal was to work with elementary school ages, 8 to 11. So I got involved with the Y's after-school program. We started somewhat late in the school year, on April 21.

I pictured a group of youngsters signing up with enthusiasm for creative explorations. But the kids who came were an existing group, discontented with their program experiences so far, and whom nobody knew what to do with. These were my regulars, some of whom “regularly” came late or left early because of previously established activities. Others had the option to drop in if they couldn't attend their regular activities that day. On any day, I had 4 to 7 children coming in. My core group included one kid with Asperger's Syndrome and one with ADHD. In general, these were not kids wanting a quiet, reflective activity, but rather, busting to move and be free of the constraints they felt in school.

Although an important goal of Focusing is to explore problematic feelings, with this group I had to start from what was immediately needed. These kids felt unwanted and defensive; they were also uncomfortable expressing feelings. My goals for the project shifted from teaching the children to Focus through the arts, to introducing Focusing-related experiences in bite-sized increments.

As I got to know the kids, I realized they all had great difficulty with inward-focused attention. Video games, violence, and murderous animated/cartoon characters were brought up repeatedly. My goal was to have them feel safe enough to be present in the here and now, to experiment and try new things, to express their true selves.

I had hoped for 75 to 90 minutes with them, but because of programming, we only had a scant hour. In addition to their other scheduled activities, such as swimming, anyone with a lot of homework had to finish it before joining in. Also, parents sometimes arrived unexpectedly early to pick up their child.

I found structuring each session with two separate activities allowed me the flexibility to accept



Minda Novek, a Focusing Trainer in New York City, can be reached at mnovek@optimum.net

latecomers or release early leavers. It also allowed me to spend more time with an activity that was going well, or less time if it was not.

Although the Y after-school staff tried to accommodate our project needs, the overall atmosphere leaned toward the chaotic. I was initially offered an open, cafeteria-sized room where many groups met at the same time. I requested a smaller private room to encourage quiet activity and have “our own space.” I got the smaller room, but due to programming shifts and some room construction, we moved 4 times during the 8 weeks I was there.

Another unexpected element was the presence of a staff member in our group. Because of Y rules, I was not able to ever be alone with the kids. But I wasn’t informed of this in advance, so this woman’s presence was a surprise just as we began Session 1. It would have helped to at least have time to prepare her for what we were undertaking. She did participate in the activities but declined my suggestion to meet and discuss workshop goals.

Activities

Each session began with an activity aimed at grounding the kids in the present, helping them become aware of their bodies and imaginations. The second activity involved drawing, painting, or storytelling with a project idea or theme that would take them further into a bodily-felt exploration.

In the first session, we discussed the concept of exploring as they knew it. Then I introduced the idea of exploring things from the inside. I also suggested, “If you don’t like something we are doing, wait a while. Every time we meet we will be exploring new ways of looking at and doing things.” The word “exploring” was a key motivator for them.

We started with their looking at a series of photos from one place, San Francisco, but taken from vastly different perspectives: looking at the city from a satellite (a bird’s eye view), looking down a steep road, and a boy looking up at the bridge and mirroring its shape with his body. I wanted to introduce the idea that what we see depends on where we are looking from. I asked

them to choose one picture to write about, but they all felt writing was “too much like homework.” They did like drawing, so they drew their responses, and we discussed them a little.

The boy who chose the bird’s eye view said, “It looks like a flood. It’s so bad you can’t even get to the boat store.” All the kids seemed to have a lot of anxiety.

We then played a game of reaching inside a bag of unfamiliar objects and describing what was inside by touch alone. I wanted them to explore the different places to put their attention and to articulate what the body was feeling. This, too, they preferred to do through drawing. Others tried to guess what the object was from the drawing.

It became clear that the kids had entered our first meeting with pent-up frustration, and now I was asking them to do things that they didn’t “get” at the onset. I closed the first session with a discussion, saying that I



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was just getting to know them, that I heard their preference for art and movement over writing. I invited them to suggest themes for exploring that interested them, hoping to build on that, and again, to let them know I heard them. Jungles, deserts, and lightning were mentioned, and I said we'd incorporate these themes in future sessions. Would they be open to exploring their imaginations? They agreed, so we reached a hopeful understanding.

One challenge was finding a balance between the familiar, so they were comfortable trying an activity, and the unfamiliar, to expand their comfort zone of experiencing.

At our next session, I introduced music. Since the kids responded to energetic movement more than seated activity, I chose music that would engage them, get them moving, yet be unfamiliar enough to set up no preconceptions. One piece suggested a Middle Eastern caravan and another, outer space. We took turns leading each other in a dance line, responding to the music.

Next, we painted to the music. I asked them to notice how the music felt and to try to paint the place, mood or energy it suggested to them. I noticed that the more I presented something as play, the less purposefulness I attached to it, the more they would engage. The music relaxed and quieted them. Some even asked for certain pieces to be played again.

The closest we came to sensing feelings was in the fourth session, when they were asked to draw a line down the center of a large sheet of paper. On one half, they were to draw something from real life that had touched them. Several drew a dead pet. Afterwards, on the other part, they were asked to draw the same subject in a way that made them feel better. M's drawings involved his father's response to him crying. The first, when he was a baby, was "okay" because he couldn't help himself. The second picture was of him crying now with his father present, not okay in his daily experience, but in the drawing it was.

While all the kids got a lot out of this activity, a later activity of clearing a space was not so successful. A complete description of the 16 activities can be found on <http://www.focusing.org/childrens-articles>.

It always took a good part of the hour for the kids to settle in to really being there. Just at the point when an engaged attentiveness had been reached, the kids were led to the next activity. This was especially true for Q (the boy with Asperger's) who had to arrive late each week. It was harder for him to join in and meant much less time for his project. For one session, Q got excited drawing an imaginary jungle (see picture). He showed great pleasure in adding each animal, a lion, flamingo, etc. When the kids were leaving, Q wanted to continue drawing. Luckily the after-school staffer could stay late that day; that meant that Q and I could stay. He was not only engaged in drawing each animal, but talked about it, making eye contact with me repeatedly (unusual for him). I wish we could have had this extended time more often.



I learned a great deal working with these kids and hope they got something helpful from the experience, too. But too much energy meant for the kids was spent just dealing with environment



issues. Experienced Focusers may be able to concentrate in a wide variety of settings and conditions, but learners, especially concentration-challenged learners, get more out of purposefully supportive environments. Conditions conducive to inner reflection enhance the learning of Focusing and Focusing-related activities such as in this program. Beyond finding organizations that welcome this kind of learning, a concerted effort is essential to prepare them in advance as to the goals, needs and benefits involved.

That being said, I hope my detailed description of our activities will be helpful for anyone interested in leading a similar class.

See <http://www.focusing.org/childrens-articles> for the entire write-up, including the names of the successful musical selections and storybooks used.



TEACHING THE TEACHERS: THE SANTEE FOCUSING INITIATIVE

By LUCINDA GRAY, *Focusing Coordinator, Costa Rica*

In the spring of 2009, Dr. Diana Marder and I worked together to present a training program for teachers in an inner city high school in Los Angeles. We were very excited because opportunities of this kind are extremely rare. At the same time, we were daunted by many challenges. Through this project we learned a great deal about all aspects of designing and executing a Focusing training program in an urban high school.

THE PROJECT SETTING

Santee Academy is an occupational/academic high school in downtown Los Angeles with about 300 students divided equally between four classes, freshman through senior, and including 25 faculty. Santee is a special high school under the direct supervision of the mayor's office, with some extra funding available.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is noted for its challenging student population, mostly from Hispanic and African-American working class and poor families. Along with limited English skills, the students at Santee suffer from endemic social problems such as family violence and abuse, poverty, alcohol and drug issues and crime, all of which contribute to a drop out rate that approaches 40 percent. We observed that the faculty was also under stress from the demands of teaching in an inner city environment and the ongoing uncertainty about working conditions, schedules and layoffs. The principal



Reach Lucinda Gray at doelucinda@gmail.com. The complete version of Lucinda Gray's experience is found at <http://www.focusing.org/childrens-articles>.

described the teaching staff as significantly stressed by their own personal problems. On the positive side he also pictured the teachers as mostly young and enthusiastic about teaching, quite bright and open to learning.

Our auspicious connection to the school came through Fernando Hernandez, Ph.D., a trainer in training with me, who introduced me to his brother Dr. Bill Hernandez, the principal of the Santee Academy. Fernando also met with Diana and me to facilitate our interface with the school district. The three of us decided from the beginning to use the Focusing approach in our own meetings and in all our interactions with the school district. Diana and I met weekly and often twice a week for the entire length of the project, which lasted from mid-March through the end of June. This program was a very intensive investment of time and effort for us.

GATHERING INFORMATION

We began our efforts with a series of meetings with the principal, and, concurrently, we initiated a review of the available literature on Focusing in schools. We found that all the prior projects were done either in elementary schools or with a very small number of children. Focusing teachers had worked in schools in the US, Canada, Europe and Afghanistan. We spent considerable time talking to them, and they were very helpful and encouraging. Through these contacts, we felt great support, which was wonderful for us.

Realizing that Focusing training had been only minimally tried within an urban high school setting, we decided to define our project as an exploratory pilot project.

NEGOTIATING A WORKING AGREEMENT

As we met with the principal over a six-week period, we listened to his perception of the needs of the school. After each meeting I sent Dr. Hernandez an email documenting what had been decided and asking him to notify me if he agreed with my version of our understanding. This was the closest I came to developing an actual contract with him for the project. As the process unfolded, some agreements I thought we had made did not work out the way we expected. Ultimately I realized that the administrative environment of the school and the district as a whole was constantly in flux, so that Dr. Hernandez, Dr. Marder and I were continuously modifying our own plans and schedule. For us, this was the most difficult aspect of the whole program.

On the positive side, we found the principal to be very cooperative and supportive. He truly had the students' needs in mind. He was particularly concerned about the needs of the seniors who were having great difficulty completing their studies and who lacked the confidence to transition to work and college. Of the 60 seniors, he said that 20 of them were in trouble and needed immediate help.

We understood the principal's concerns about the students but felt that working with the faculty had to come first. First, we needed their support if we were ever to work with students. Secondly, we didn't have sufficient time or the number of trainers necessary for a student program. Therefore we proposed a training program for the faculty with a possible follow-up project for the students.

FUNDING

Diana and I were both engaged in full-time private practices as psychologists, and we needed to be paid in order to take time out for the project. Dr. Hernandez told us he could fund the project if he could pay for our materials rather than paying for our time. In order to pay us for our time, he would have to write a grant proposal and get it approved by the board of education, which process

could take up to a year. To avoid delay and uncertainty, he suggested that we could be paid for the workbooks we produced for each workshop, that could be sold to the district for a set fee. We agreed to produce four workbooks to coincide with a four workshop schedule, each workshop to be two and a half hours long. These workbooks consisted of excerpts from many articles about Focusing, plus additional material which we wrote ourselves.

One major focus of our negotiations with the principal was the issue of how much teacher time could be allocated to the project. Teacher time is very expensive. Whenever the principal releases a teacher from classroom duties he has to budget the time and pay for it out of school funds. We knew that a minimum of 12 hours is necessary for an introductory Focusing workshop. The principal wanted to allow us only 8. We compromised on 10 hours, but with the constant schedule changes, we eventually only had the eight hours he originally offered.

CREATING THE WORKSHOPS: A CONSTANTLY EMERGING PROCESS

The entire project was a process of continually adapting our methods, based on our evaluation of the effectiveness of the various approaches we used. Since we could not expect to teach a complete introductory Focusing workshop in the time available, we limited our goals to teaching Clearing a Space, an introduction to Felt Sensing and the Focusing way of Listening. Outlines were constantly being revised as the schedule unfolded.

In the first workshop, we took some time to describe Focusing in general terms. We found that the faculty could only sustain attention to didactic material for very short periods of time. So we limited didactic presentations to ten minutes and interspersed them with short experiential processes. The faculty responded well to this general format, especially to the experiential processes such as the listening exercises.

We knew that we needed to engage the teachers on a personal level, listen to their concerns about teaching, their experiences in the classroom, and inquire about their problems. Through this process they came to life and responded with enthusiasm. For example, the first important breakthrough came when we asked them about how they felt about the trauma that students were experiencing and how it affected them. At first, they responded that they did not see students undergoing trauma. However, after just a few minutes, one teacher mentioned a student she was concerned about. Immediately several other teachers began to report worrisome difficulties from their students. They seemed to truly appreciate the opportunity to share their feelings of concern. It seemed that almost all the teachers were experiencing vicarious trauma. Several of the teachers reported stress symptoms such as headaches and insomnia.

Another area of success was in the listening exercises. Diana and I demonstrated several stages, beginning with listening silently while expressing concern, and continuing through a simplified reflective listening process. The teachers really enjoyed talking to each other about what they were experiencing in the classroom and what they felt the problems were. It seemed clear that they needed a safe place to express their feelings and a chance to build supportive community.

The exercises in Clearing a Space were very successful. The teachers seemed to grasp the concepts and were able to practice the process. The concept of Felt Sensing was more difficult to communicate in the short time we had available.

Of course there was a wide variation in teacher response. At the end of each session, we handed out feedback forms and asked the teachers to write a few sentences describing their response to that session. Most of the responses were positive, and some were very enthusiastic especially about

listening and Clearing a Space. A few of the teachers handed their forms back blank, or responded that they were bored. Some teachers were more open to personal contact than others. Some even requested individual help on their own time.

We were very pleased with the response of the faculty to the workbooks. Most of them read the entire workbook before each workshop, and they were enthusiastic about the articles. These four workbooks will be available by contacting me at doelucinda@gmail.com

OUTCOME

Initially, I was disappointed about our program, because the effort was so great and conditions so limiting. It was as though we were constantly swimming through an ever-changing environment. When I later talked to the school principal Dr. Hernandez, however, he informed me that subsequent to our program, there had been a significant uptick in all three indicators of success. The three indicators are: grades, attendance, and dropout rate. Grades improved, attendance improved, and dropout rate, (one of their major concerns) decreased. I was surprised and gratified to hear this wonderful positive feedback.

I think these good results reflect the power of Focusing and the effectiveness of our presence, giving personal attention to the needs of the faculty and staff.

