

Focusing Week Long In New York

Adrian Farrelly

I felt privileged to have been able to go to New York in November 2001 and attend the Certification Course of the Focusing Institute. Having studied Focusing since 1990 I felt the time was right to attend the week long which was being directed by Drs. Mary McGuire and Janet Klein.

There were 20 participants on the course. Twelve were from the U.S., three from Canada, two from Hungary, one from England, one from Belgium and myself. The weeklong certification is the final stage in training as a focusing teacher. Those attending are required to have practiced focusing for some years and completed the different levels of training. Also one needs to be recommended by a co-ordinator beforehand. I was happy to have had the backing of my good friends, co-ordinators Kathleen Kavanagh and Anne Kelly.

Different ways of Focusing

Over the week we explored different ways Focusing can be taught. Mary and Janet gave their input and participants were asked to share the ways they found useful. Individuals were encouraged to find ways of teaching focusing that fitted for them.



Time during the week was given to Interactive Focusing. Janet developed the technique. Attention was also given to the Inner Child and the Inner Critic and how to work with it when it comes up in the teaching/therapy process. Also covered was the keeping of the space safe, listening, coaching, working from the bodysense and experiential listening. There was a lot of experiential content over the week and this for me proved to be a real learning exercise. Focusing is really understood when it is practiced. It was a rich experience focusing with people from such varied backgrounds and nationality and culture. Mary and Janet often led focusing demonstrations and at other times we would go off in twos or threes to focus. Gene Gendlin gave a day on dreams. He spoke

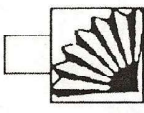
for some time on Focusing and then invited those present to share dreams with him. Meeting Gene was a highlight of the week for the group. One can see how he lives his life from his felt sense and what a difference that makes. That evening Gene and his wife Mary (Hendricks-Gendlin) invited the group to their home for an evening gathering. I had the privilege of having some time with him where I shared what area of Focusing I was interested in pursuing. He was most interested and encouraging and shared from his own life.

Innovative methods

On evenings individuals were invited to share methods or techniques which they found could be connected to focusing and which they felt were enhanced by focusing. I was impressed with the demonstration of EMDR and Focusing. EMDR—(Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)—is an innovative method of psychotherapy that enhances people's ability to resolve problems in living by assisting them to attend to internal experiences and external stimuli at the same time. The external stimuli used can be touch, sight and sound. The stimuli alternate between the right and left side of the body in the hope of restoring the ability of the brain's processing. Focusing was

Inside This Issue:

Focusing Week Long in New York	by Adrian Farrelly O.P.	Page 1/2
A New kind of crossing	by Mary Jennings	Page 2
Exploring the Background Feeling	by Freda Copley	Page 2 / 3
Focusing Facilitators		Page 4
Calendar of events		Page 4



used in guiding the client through the process.

On the final night Mary Hendricks presented the Certificates to those present. It was a tearful moment for many as it was a high point in our journey through focusing.

A sense of belonging

Above all it was a week for people who had been training and practising focusing for a number of years to come together to share, reflect, discuss and focus, a week creating a space whereby we could give attention to that place inside that had learned to live in a new way through focusing. For me it was one of the best weeks in my life. It felt very right to be there and there was a great sense of belonging. The individuals in the group made a deep impression on me and we learned much from each other. Since returning home I have started a research MA in Focusing and Christian Spirituality at All Hallows College. The weeklong gave me the incentive and the courage to take on the challenge. Focusing has so much to offer in every area in life. Gene encourages us to develop focusing further in the areas of our lives.

Adrian Farrelly

A new kind of crossing on the Isle of Cumbræ

Mary Jennings

For me, there's always a sense of 'letting go' when I travel by sea; as you launch out into the water there is a strong sense of going into and over the unknown with no turning back. I had that sense as the ferry left Largs, in Scotland, for the Isle of Cumbræ where the Focusing on Philosophy course took place last September.

Gendlin's *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* was the text for study. First published in 1962, it explores the relationship between the felt dimension of experience, what focusers call the felt sense, and how we symbolise or express

that experience. In effect it explores 'how experiencing functions in cognition'.

My own paraphrased summary runs: experiencing or felt sensing is how we 'know' things; symbolisation (including language, gestures, images) is how we express what we know. It is from this raw material - experiencing first, then symbolisation - that we can form the concepts/patterns that guide how we are in the world. Thus our experiencing and our capacity for logical thinking *function together* - it's not a matter of privileging 'intuition' (experiencing) over logic or conceptual thinking or vice-versa: they work together. And they do so in quite specific ways; Gendlin explores these ways in this work.

With inputs, small group discussion, readings of the text and practical exercises designed to bring key concepts alive, the week flew by, wonderfully facilitated by Rob Foxcroft, Campbell Purton and Barbara McGavin.

What are the key things I took with me about the way experiencing functions? Two things. One is that our experiencing is always more intricate than we can say, for instance). But the more we can open up the symbols /words/images/metaphors that come from our felt sense, the richer the experiencing. We can open up a symbol - a word for instance - by asking, "what kind of " " is that, or, "What would you like that " " to mean, just here, just now." Try this. You will be amazed. Yesterday, my felt sense of a project was that I 'don't know what to do next'. I inquired what *do* might mean here; what came was 'doing is about listening, absorbing, creating'. My usual sense of 'doing' has a forced, just-get-on-with-it quality, but this was a different *kind of* doing; a whole new way of working on the project is beginning to emerge.

I also recall a very exciting 'crossing conversation' four of us had on the subject of creativity.

Each person got a felt sense of what creativity meant. As each person shared we were invited to allow what he or she said to 'cross' with our felt sense: in what way might creativity as 'curiosity' cross with creativity as 'about something that's important to me' for instance? In effect, we were using another person's symbolisation of a felt sense as a way to further open up our symbolisation of our felt sense. We can do this because, as Gendlin's asserts, all our experiences are interconnected at some level. Not only is 'crossing' a good way to listen deeply to others, it is also a way to listen deeply to our own experiencing.

These were new insights for me. There's more, still being digested, but I recall a wonderful week, in great company with kind-hearted hospitality in a beautiful place. I'm looking up the ferry timetables for next year already.

Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning Eugene Gendlin Northwestern University Press (1962). Available from The Focusing Institute 34 East Lane, Spring Valley, New York 10977 USA or from the website www.focusing.org.

For information on Focusing on Philosophy contact Barbara McGavin. E-mail bjmcgavin@focusing.co.uk.

Mary Jennings

EXPLORING THE BACKGROUND FEELING

by Freda Copley

At the International Conference in Ireland in 2001, Marine de Freminville from Montreal ran a workshop on Focusing on the background feeling. I found this work very helpful and was delighted by the exploration and the clearing I received.

We began by clearing a space and letting all our issues rest. What was my background feeling? I knew that I often woke up feeling unwilling to start the day. What was there to look forward to? I did not have a name for this recurring feeling but



suddenly I had an image of a dark, thick cloud behind me. This darkness fitted round my body from a seam that was located just behind my ears, I was stuck in it and the darkness seemed to stretch back a long way.

We were asked what our life would be like without the background feeling. I found myself sitting at the top of a mountain in brilliant sunshine. The sky was a brilliant blue and I could see a distant countryside that was peaceful and beautiful.

I felt very surprised. It had always seemed to me that as I cleared a layer of unhappiness, or dysfunction, of negativity or muddle, I would uncover another layer of not-okay-ness, that I needed to heal. Instead of my imagined burden of uncloaking 'the seven veils' of trauma and problems I was sitting out in the sun, in the clear after one simple imagining. It could not be this easy! I knew I had more work to do on myself, a longer sentence to serve! yet I was sitting in the sun with no darkness in sight.

Well, if you are given a free pardon, accept it! The Bio-Spiritual Focusers talk about 'grace' and this freedom felt like a gift to me. I sat on my mountain and absorbed the sun. There were a few white clouds in the sky, there was nothing that I had to do so I watched them. The clouds began to make faces, friendly faces and comic ones, some of the clouds waved to me. I felt happy and peaceful and very still.

Marine asked us what we had never done for our background feeling. I saw the dark cloud again. It said it had not been given attention or gentleness. I faced the dark cloud and listened to it, like early morning mist it began to roll up and stream away.

Some time later I did the exercise again. This time my background feeling looked like grey wallpaper on a wall a yard or so behind me. On the pale grey paper was a pattern of small black hooks drooping downwards. I was pleased to find that this feeling was not as dark nor as solid as the first experience had been, also it was some way behind me, not touching and partly enclosing me. The image amused me, it did not seem very bad.

When I asked what my life would be like without this background feeling a roller blind shot up behind me, letting in a great shaft of sunlight. This background feeling had not been a wall, only a sun blind and there was plenty of beauty to see outside.

Today I have looked for a background

feeling again. I saw a thin sheet of slightly brown water sliding down some way behind me. As I have been planting seeds on my allotment today, this image is not a surprise, the tint in the water seems more like a hint of peat in a river or plant food, it almost feels friendly. The word 'duty' came up and that seemed to be the background consideration that 'should' come before pleasure! So tomorrow I am going to the seaside with friends and we shall look at chalets and consider buying one to play in and stay in for holidays and painting breaks and beachcombing along white sands on our own local beach.

Isn't it strange what a difference Focusing can make! Please notice this health warning- if you use this process you may feel very happy and start having fun with your life! Don't say we didn't warn you!

Freda Copley

Focusing partners on the internet

Focusing Institute staff have been working intensively for more than a year to create the internet-based Focusing Partnership Program, which has just gone live at the Institute's website at www.focusing.org

For the first time, anyone from experienced Focuser to complete novice will be able to request a Focusing partner on-line. Issues of security, confidentiality, and appropriate partner matching have been carefully thought through. Senior trainers have been signed up to serve as coaches for new Focusers, who can buy a three-session Introductory Coaching Package. There's a lot more detail about the Partnership Program on the website.

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New Book on Focusing

Bala Jaison. PhD, a Canadian psychotherapist and focusing trainer, has produced a very interesting book entitled *Integrating Experiential and Brief Therapy*. Billed as a guide for therapists and counsellors on integrating experiential and Brief therapy, this book will be of interest to focusers generally and should be of particular interest to trainers. Bala has been working for some years on integrating focusing-based or experiential therapy with the more solution-based approach of Brief Therapy. She calls this integrated approach SOFT (solution oriented focusing therapy). In the manual she outlines the similarities and differences in both approaches and, critically, when they can be combined. Written in a very clear and accessible style, with lots of case studies and examples, it is a very enjoyable read. Not to minimise the skill, experience and expertise of the trained clinician, but what comes through again and again is perhaps something we can all do: by listening carefully to people in a non-judgemental and congruent way we can be a powerful catalyst for change. Highly recommended by the complete non-expert on either therapy or listening! The book is available through the Focusing Institute, website www.focusing.org or The Focusing Institute 34 East Lane Spring Valley New York 10977 or www.cavershambooksellers.com.

Mary Jennings

A New Tomorrow — New Poems by Anne Kelly

Focusing Coordinator Anne Kelly has a new book of poetry, *A New Tomorrow*.

This is another lovely collection with proceeds in aid of L'Arche Ireland, the organisation that cares for people with intellectual disabilities. Anne teaches focusing to L'Arche care workers as part of their induction training. Copies of the book are available from L'Arche, Seolta, Warrenhouse Road Baldoyle Dublin 13. The poem *Epiphany* seems to point to the experience of felt sense/felt shift.

Epiphany

*Something enters unbidden
Fleeting thought with image
Epiphany*

*Nothing prepares us for the challenge
Of who or what may join us
In surprise*

*Life points to grace
Availability, openness to gift
And welcome*

*Life points to oasis
Slaking of thirst and weariness
Comfort and healing.*