



Focusing in Ireland

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The 1st Irish National Focusing Conference

By Carmel Raftery

The 1st Irish National Focusing Conference was held in All Hallows Dublin, on September 17th, 2005 marking a new era in focusing in Ireland. It was an exciting day, a day that had lots of variety, with something for everybody. The highlight, of course was the brilliant input given by our guest speaker Rob Foxcroft. Rob, a member of the Scottish Focusing Association, has been focusing for eighteen years, and a co-ordinator since the beginning of the nineties. In his summer weeklongs, he helps focusing people make sense of some of the philosophical writings of Gene Gendlin.

This is what he proposed to do for us, and succeeded in doing in his two brilliant inputs; 'Stepping out of our formulas' and 'Sensing into the unknown'. Though the time at his disposal was altogether too short, it was long enough to challenge us to deepen our understanding of the philosophical basis of focusing. He encouraged us to read 'Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning' and 'A process Model'. There, he said we would find 'all the delicacy, power and refinement of real philosophical conversation'.

The intellectual and the practical were very well blended in both of Rob's exposés. Even those who were new to Focusing could identify and enter into 'The Soup Experience'. This body-experience was for many people something surprising and new. Then, the beautiful and touching demonstration of the *poetic response* was a great help before we were invited

to do our own work in pairs.

Finally, we were called to action. We were invited 'to do something deliberate, by way of picking up what we had got from the day, putting it in a basket, and taking it home with us'.

The action step, Rob insisted should have four qualities. It had to be:

do-able
will-do-able
celebrate-able, and
follow-through-able.

And to make it more practicable still, the follow-through-able had to have built into it the following three questions;

What?
Where?
When?



Rob Foxcroft and Kathleen Kavanagh at the conference.

The great variety of workshops ensured that all needs and tastes were catered for, and the buzz after each was assurance in itself that great things happened in the different workshops.

Jim Bagnell gave an Introduction to Focusing to the newcomers, and they came out feeling they had a somewhat clearer understanding of focusing.

Siobhan Tiernan and Fiona Pryle brought their big group through dreams, and whetted their appetites for more.

Those of us who joined Mary Jennings went away feeling that we, too, like her could put focusing into practice in our daily lives.

And as we left Monica O'Loughlin with lots of energy to write our own Haiku.

Finally, as the day drew to an end, we were all very moved when the following message from Gene Gendlin was read out by Adrian.

'I am excited and encouraged by all of you and your meeting which will make the world a friendlier place'.

And Mary Gendlin in her message congratulated us on our first national conference and paid tribute to the pioneers and the great work they did over the years. 'This first national conference' she said, 'will surely be a model for others, as we begin to shape what community is for us. And you are sharing with each other across the range of focusing applications all the "Edges"'.

She had a longing to be with us, she said and referred to her Irish roots, and how she felt so much at home at the Irish International.

All that is left now is to start looking forward and preparing for the next National Conference. Hopefully, it will be an annual event.

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"The Radical Acceptance of Everything"

by Ann Weiser Cornell.

A review by John Keane

This book is subtitled "Living a Focusing Life". I sit now with a very strong sense that much of the author's life is reflected through the pages of this book. In a very concrete way Ann has gifted us all in sharing the struggles, the pains, the insights and joys of her wonderful journey.

This work is made up of a collection of articles. It can be read in sections or it can be read through. My own personal experience is that while the individual articles are most interesting and very well written, one gets a real sense of the evolution (or carrying forward) of the writers own journey from reading it in its entirety. Like many things in focusing, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

"The Radical Acceptance of Everything" not only appeals intellectually but also impacts on the felt level of cognition. There were many occasions when I had to leave the book down for a few hours or a few days to process what it had evoked in my body. I was especially struck by the article she includes written by Barbara McGavin "Focusing with the Part that Wants to Die". Language fails to communicate the richness of this text. If you do nothing else in 2006, read this article.

Ann Weiser Cornell takes up a great challenge of Gendlin's in this book. He tells us that we must make our concepts from experience. The proof of this can be found throughout this book. She very bravely includes many stories from her own process - stories that still lie very close to her heart. She uses these stories and her experience as a facilitator to develop her own focusing concepts and methods.

The manner in which she communicates these developments is both fascinating and challenging. I cannot say that I agree with all that she has to say in these articles, but she never imposes these concepts or methods on the reader. Rather, she articulates how her thinking has developed and supports these findings with examples from her own process, and the processes of others.

I agree with much of what Ann says in her articles e.g., with regards to our relationship with the critic, and our use of language within the focusing process. While resonating with these topics, I found a great sense of relief - an echoing through the pages of the strong felt senses that I experience myself. The parts that I don't agree with can be held in a gently alert way - conscious that these may be areas that I have not yet explored within my own process.

One may get the impression from this article that Ann Weiser Cornell has developed some sort of "new focusing". I believe that this would be an inaccurate criticism. She remains strongly loyal to her mentor and teacher Eugene Gendlin. This book marks a continuation of, rather than a departure from, Gendlin's model.

She tells us: "To define a process by the way it is taught is to lose the essence of the process." This work marks an exploration of how she has developed both her own skills as a focuser and her skills of sharing this process with others.

Ann does not hold strictly to the six steps, rather she alters and adapts the way the process is taught. I believe she has preserved the essence of the process in this endeavour. Perhaps she has provided us with a wider bridge into this domain - a bridge firmly built upon her own experiences.

This book should appeal to a wide audience. The clear and precise language used to communicate the process will delight the beginner. The focusing professional can use it as a resource to assist them develop their own practices and ideas. And, for those of us interested in the conceptual foundation of Gendlin's work this book stands as a wonderfully clear translation of how his concepts impact on real lives.

"The Radical Acceptance of Everything" is well worth a read. But don't just reflect on it with your mind, let it sink in and nourish the body as well. For me, it is one of those rare books that will be kept and read again and again.

Anne Weiser Cornell's book can be purchased at www.focusingresources.com/materials.html or from the Focusing Institute or from Barbara McGavin, or from www.amazon.com

Focusing in the West

By Breda Fadden

Here in Galway Focusing is flowing on an even keel-as is the nature of Focusing; no great highs or lows! Currently, Aine Barrins, Peter Duffy, and myself are offering an initial Focusing-training programme. Level 1 took place in November, and Level 2 in January. We also plan to offer two speciality workshops later in the spring: *Focusing and Dreams* and *Focusing and Spirituality*. Although the attending group is small, the interest and enthusiasm for the focusing process is very inspiring. Many of the trainees are either qualified or trainee counselors or therapists. We wonder how best to make known and spread information about Focusing and courses to the general public? Due to life situations in the autumn, we simply advertised by word-of-mouth and in the local newspaper.

Something that heartens me in my own practice is an increasing number of clients who come seeking individual counselling focusing sessions who have been introduced to it while in cancer care around the country. Focusing is such a gentle and respectful healing medium using the body that it fits well in the healing of a body that has been dis-eased by cancer. Mind, body, and spirit are eased back to wellness, using the gentle art of Focusing.

Then there is our monthly Focusing group in Galway, which continues to offer support and nourishment to all its members through Focusing experience, social exchange, and exchange of information, books, tapes, and videos. Numbers vary from month to month, but there is a solid core, and we hope to enlarge the group through the people attending the training workshops. Last but not least, personally I look forward to facilitating a six-day Focusing retreat with Ann O'Byrne in Myross Wood Retreat Centre in west Cork in July.

Focusing in the Mid-West

By Tom O'Halloran

The Mid West Focusing Group came into existence in August 2004 after some of us had met at the weeklong in Glencomeragh. Before long it became apparent that we needed to set down some ground rules around safety for our Focusing partnerships. We began a dialogue that lasted several months. A part of me recoiled against the need for such rules. Isn't Focusing as teacher and the reverence I have for myself and for another as we Focus sufficient? Another part of me kept protesting - 'In today's society, we do need to keep on our toes as regards awareness.' Eventually the latter part won out in the group and we finally agreed on a preliminary code. The Focusing process itself may be more important than the code and it is easy enough to assent to a code. However, it is much harder to shed the awareness that a process brings.

Whoever has successfully completed level two of Focusing training is welcome to join our group, provided they are willing to abide by our code.

In November we successfully hosted a Focusing day designed to facilitate the expansion of our group. Two of our members offered a level one Focusing Workshop in February and recently one of our members co-led a workshop on Focusing and Dreams.

I value our regular Focusing meetings. They motivate and support me as I use a skill that has become a way of life.

Latest Focusing News from Belfast

By Sr. Kathleen Savage.

Focusing Workshops

Focusing & Spirituality 1 & 2nd April 2005 (Crossgar)

Focusing & The Inner Child 13 & 14th May 2006 (Crossgar)

Two Focusing Workshops (Pat & Mairead) 26th February 2006 (P.C.I. Dublin)

Level 2 Developing the Skills of Listening (Kathleen & Camilla) date to be finalised. (Belfast)

Focusing Community Night (Thursday fortnightly) (Belfast)

Chaplaincy work and Counselling St. Patrick's College, Antrim Road, Belfast Camilla uses a Focusing approach in her work with Adolescent Boys. More of her success with Focusing is included in this month's newsletter.

Counselling and Focusing Integrative approaches in the Therapeutic Setting Pat and Kathleen both integrate Focusing into their daily work.

Focusing and Children Kathleen is using Focusing with the children in Holy Cross Girl's School who have had so many difficult and traumatic issues to deal with.

New Beginnings:

Parent's Holy Cross Girl's School Belfast Two Introductory Sessions 13th & 20th February 2006. (Camilla, Margaret, Raymond, Pat, Kathleen)

Focusing with Prayer Guides Down & Connor Belfast (Pat) 4th March 2006.

International Conference Five members will attend the in the Netherlands in May. (Pat, Camilla, Raymond, Margaret and Kathleen)

Introduction to Focusing an International Group Experience. Raymond had worked with the Group in this way during his Immersion Experience in Kenya in July/August, hosted by the Christian Brothers

Focusing and Bereavement Corpus Christi College. Raymond introducing Focusing to adolescent boys who have experienced bereavement through suicide, trauma and violent or unexpected sudden deaths in the family circle.

We are happy to say that Focusing is spreading. We are hearing of its benefits from the individuals who have had a taster through the introductory sessions. Others who have had more experience through the ongoing work or workshops are reporting of the many benefits they are finding in their daily lives as a result. We find this encouraging and affirming of what we are offering here in the North.

Greg Madison, a Canadian psychotherapist who worked in Ireland at one point and was part of the early start of focusing in Ireland asks:

What is a Focusing-oriented person?

For me, this is a person who is guided by their unclear experience (whether they know Focusing or not). A person who trusts and intends to follow their own feeling of 'rightness' outwards into action in the world while remaining aware of their effect on others. Such a person does not accept external authority or imposed hierarchy as the last word but instead values a deep democracy everywhere (inside and out). Therefore, such a person recognises the feeling of, and tries to learn from, express, recover from, moments of internal oppressiveness as well as challenge restrictive external structures. A focusing person accepts the experience of life as unfinished process - we don't clearly know where we're going, except in retrospect. This person values openness, complexity, not-knowing, and recognises his or her own 'narrowed-down' feeling as a signal to bring attention back to the whole of living. These experiential values apply equally to oneself and others - respectful listening to myself and to another person is one process, not two. I intend this post to be a comment on both subjects - my view of a focusing-oriented person, and a focusing-oriented organisation. What kind of Focusing organisation would evolve out of such persons? In my opinion, we're not there yet.

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