

On Setting Up a Reading Group to Explore Gendlin's Philosophy

Suggestions emerging from a Roundtable on the topic

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In November 2021 we hosted two Roundtables with the theme *On Setting Up a Reading Group to Explore Gendlin's Philosophy*. The conversation with over 45 participants was really fruitful. Here we set out some of the insights, suggestions and tips that arose from the conversation. We hope that you will find them useful and that you are encouraged to set up your own reading group: studying Gendlin's philosophy can be a transformative experience in so many ways in our work as Focusing teachers, guides and practitioners.

Forming a group

Where to find potential group members came up several times. The suggestion is to work with what's there – if you are part of a network, a changes group or any other gathering, this may offer an opportunity to find people. If local opportunities are not readily available, an international reading group can offer an opportunity as it is now well supported by available technology.

One of the participants highlighted the importance of 'fit' in forming a group that will continue. There was agreement that diversity brings real benefits in terms of experience and perspective and can prevent groupthink. 'Fit' is also about interest and motivation. It is also about approaching the exploration in a felt-sensing way.

Acknowledging obstacles and how they might be overcome

English not being a first language is a significant barrier for many; this can be difficult to overcome, but we can hope that translations will facilitate wider reading in the future. Some of Gendlin's work has been translated into other languages – see
http://previous.focusing.org/gendlin/gol_intro.asp for more information on available texts.

Gendlin's language may be experienced as abstract and opaque at times, particularly at when first exploring his work. Lack of comfort with the vocabulary is not really surprising when we consider that Gene was creating new concepts. The suggestion is to follow Gene's advice that the best way to read philosophy is "many times".

Some participants shared Rob Parker's suggestions as a way to work with the difficulty posed:

- Keeping a glossary of terms - adding to what you've written as understanding develops.
- Trying to "Read Gendlin from the place from which he writes"; he is finding new concepts that are about an *experiencing process*, not about creating fixed concepts.

The courses offered by TIFI featuring Gendlin's philosophy can be a helpful resource and several people have attended these. Some raised a question about the accessibility of the content, while others observed that personal reading or reading in a group can create a readiness to participate in these forums; this facilitates a deeper engagement with the work over time.

Ways of reading together

A helpful suggestion is to begin the reading session with a simple attunement: this can help people to enter into a ‘listening mode’, aware of what is going on for other people in the group and helping to find a pace that is in tune with people in the group.

There was a lively conversation about what ‘reading in a Focusing way’ might be for a group: suggestions include that it’s about taking time to sense into the text, seeing how particular aspects land; taking pauses and allowing the sense of the whole thing to form. One suggestion is to ‘read the text like a poem - what is resonating, what strikes me about that, what touches me?’

Taking turns reading aloud can help; some people may wish to have the opportunity to read back what has been read out loud.

There is no need to rush the reading or have ‘page targets’ -one paragraph might take up a whole session. Members of the group are free to pause the process: this makes for safety for everyone. Accompanying anyone who is “stuck” or “unclear” is always worthwhile; it can clarify and open up the text for everyone. All of this allows time for each person to make their contribution; to offer different perspectives and understanding; to tease out the text with examples from life.

At times, when the reading seems hard, it can be helpful to simply go on and read the next paragraph; this can change the dynamic. Taking time with those ‘aha’ moments, when they come can be wonderful!

What text to read?

Following your interests is a good way to choose a Gendlin text. For reference, the Philosophy of the Implicit section of TIFI website has suggestions on ‘core texts’ to get you started. <https://focusing.org/more/philosophy-implicit> . Note that many of Gendlin’s papers are freely available at the Gendlin Online Library
http://previous.focusing.org/gendlin/gol_intro.asp

Mary Jennings, Coordinator-in-Training and Margaret Quinn, Focusing Training, are part of a reading group in Dublin, Ireland. They would like to thank Susan Lennox for her work in facilitating this and so many other Roundtables over the years. Thanks too to Rebecca Mueller who had the initial inspiration for this Roundtable on setting up a reading group.