

EUROPEAN FOCUSING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, MAY 2018. GREECE.

‘Upscaling Focusing’ or ‘Social Focusing’... (a ‘workshop’)

GREG MADISON. gregmadison@mac.com

You will notice that if I am going to be consistent with what I am saying, I should say ‘we have two hours, please do what you want and see who wants to join you’...

I am interested in the possibility of the Focusing process, the bodily implicit, embodied interaction, felt sensing, whatever you want to call it, being a model for group formation:

For eg: how we organise Focusing as a movement in the world, how we have a Focusing Institute if such a thing is even consistent with Focusing, how we have Focusing or other conferences, how we teach Focusing, how we organise within our social & political communities. Could all these activities be an extension of the Focusing process we know individually and in partnerships?

If we could describe a model of group interaction continuous with Focusing, would we want to be a part of it? If for some reason we can’t ‘upscale’ Focusing to these more social levels, why not? At what point does the bodily process break down as a ‘guide’ to organising, or at what point do we lose faith in Focusing and reach for conventional forms of organising - rightly or wrongly....

How would we make our two hours together an instance of ‘upscaling Focusing’?

1. Firstly I think we would want to be guided by our felt sense of this topic - am I interested in this in some way? What way am I, as an individual, interested in this? If at any point you are not interested at all, please be guided by that feeling and do what would feel more right. Like in Focusing, there should be no compulsion (force, constraint, obligation). We don’t do that to ourselves when Focusing, so should we do that to ourselves in groups?
2. Starting with a topic, like ‘Social Focusing’ or ‘Upscaling Focusing’ is like starting a Focusing session with a life situation of some kind (rather than just saying ‘anywhere’ into the body), so I will offer a bit of BACKGROUND so that we can each form a feeling of this whole issue:

Upscaling Focusing

- *Can we take a consistent Focusing approach all the way from our personal and partnership practice to these larger interpersonal situations?*

Personally I was shocked when The Focusing Institute was formed. I thought these people do not understand Focusing. I thought it was an attempt to import the conventional hierarchical way of doing things into a loose community based upon a process that was

anything but conventional, a process that no one invented or owned. Rather than the individual body's own knowing we would end up with an external centralised (American) authority and the usual kinds of inflexible institutional power and standardization and rules imposed upon what the body would create for itself.

Remember, I am saying these things to invite your body to form a felt sense about all this. You don't have to agree with me at all... I'm not sure I agree with me. In fact I am asking questions that I have no answer to.... So your participation is welcome.

Gene Gendlin would never want to be the final word on anything, but in 1994 Gene wrote 'What kind of organisation fits with focusing?'. It's the only written thing I could find explicitly about organising Focusing.

1. In it he says he resisted any attempts at a focusing organisation for years because most organisations are oppressive and limiting. But he also felt that without any organisation Focusing would be very hard to find.

IS THAT TRUE? HARDLY ANY OF MY TEACHING REQUIRES ME TO BELONG TO TIFI, NONE OF IT IS SUPPORTED BY TIFI, VERY FEW OF MY STUDENTS KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT TIFI OR EVER EVEN LOOK AT THE FI SITE! I have taught Focusing and FOT to countless students and therapists for over 27 years and none of this required an Institute.

2. His solution is a subtle dance between organisation and no-organisation. He thought we needed enough organisation to provide what is needed, without the limiting effects.

WHAT KIND OF ORGANISATION COULD PROVIDE WHAT IS NEEDED WITHOUT LIMITATIONS? WHAT IS IT THAT WE NEED THAT CAN ONLY BE PROVIDED BY AN 'INSTITUTE' LIKE TIFI? He says it's similar with Focusing, remember the 6 steps and also forget the 6 steps. Know them but don't get stuck on them. We need certification and we need no-certification. So, he is drawing a link between what we know from Focusing and how we could organise together.

3. This kind of organisation does not limit what you want to do 'on your own'. Gene wanted us to be 'on our own' developing our own unique approaches long enough that we would not allow any committee to come along and tell us what we can and cannot do. FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW THAT KIND OF COMMITTEE WOULD NOT BE CONSISTENT WITH FOCUSING.

4. There is no meeting or group who can decide anything binding on you as a Focusing teacher and Gene urges us to continue to resist that power. ARE WE STILL RESISTING THAT? It is not personal failings but the organisational structure itself that causes centralisation of power and sedimentation of structure.

Gene – I don't know how to have an organization that does not “freeze and defeat the spirit and the human purpose of what is being offered”. I would say this is also about the ways we teach, the ways we have conferences, every social level of human activity.

5. **“This is not just our question alone; it is an exciting political question in the world: How can people organise themselves in a different way? ... The great movements of the 20th Century all failed around this issue. Whatever their ideal and aims, the mode of organisation was always the same, and that (not the ideals) determined what really happened...Focusing and everything that it opens should lead to a different mode for people to organise! It should lead to more than individual process.”**

6. Social situations cannot be forms imposed on people, they must be opportunities for further forming, so each person can still change the situation for themselves. The

organisational aspect must work so well that we can stand exceptions without falling apart. Don't identify too much with the name of the organization. Eg: if I don't prepare my class it is chaotic, if its over-prepared and I stick to the plan there is no life. But if I know the points really well I can let go and the class becomes generative and covers the points in a better way than I could think of. ORGANISATIONS NEED TO BE PROCESSES, NOT UNITS, VERBS NOT NOUNS.

7. Licensing freezes things: "I ended up referring to our own certifying process as 'this horseshit'. Certification makes for power issues between people, and so it falsifies what really matters.... I would not give my stamp so others can go around and stamp people. Of course it would benefit a coordinator to certify people in focusing, and keep what they pay for that. But I wouldn't agree to it, and I don't think it would be fair. But, how should this be managed in the future? Let us all write each other ideas on the kind of organisation that goes with focusing, including half-formed pieces of ideas, so that we have a rich ongoing discussion'.

You may be having a felt sense forming now?

From our own listening practice, we can feel the importance of a kind of body-to-body resonance. Gendlin's philosophy describes a body that is open and interacting with the environment, including the process of other living beings. The Body is networked when we are in a group, what we felt sense is not solely individual but our unique take on what is shared.... There is a unique PERSON but this person is not a closed system. We do not therefore become a collection of unrelated atoms, or even some collective mob, but a network of open systems, operating together. This is one way of understanding what we know from Focusing and from Gene's philosophy of the body.

Scientists seem to be confirming something similar:

When we experience arts together, our bodies synchronise. Could this help our politics?
<https://www.thealternative.org.uk/dailyalternative/2018/3/28/synching-experience-politics>
Also reported in: PRACTICE, PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, ARTISTS
March 29, 2018

Dr Joe Devlin, psychologist at UCL, who led the study, said: "Usually, a group of individuals will each have their own heart rates and rhythms, with little relationship to each other. But romantic couples or highly effective teammates will actually synchronise their hearts so that they beat in time with each other, which in itself is astounding."

Dr Devlin said, "Experiencing the live theatre performance was extraordinary enough to overcome group differences and produce a common physiological experience in the audience members....This clearly demonstrates that the physiological synchrony observed during the performance was strong enough to overcome social group differences and engage the audience as a whole."

If we believe that we are not discrete & complete units acting on each other, but rather we are open and 'inter-affecting', then perhaps we can expect a kind of emergent intelligence to form from our bodily being-together.

We need a Focusing practice that models our belief and trust in this way of being together in a group - aligning with the intelligence that arises from interconnectedness and guides our topics at conferences, our decisions together and our ways of organising consistent with this process.

SOCIAL FOCUSING: USE CARDS IF WANTED.

1. Clear a space from individual concerns.
2. Invite a felt sense about this issue of how Focusing might be a template for group organizing. A sense of how we are living this together through each unique body.
3. Silently ask inside - what feels most important right now. What aspect of this question feels most alive for you? IMAGINE, WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE IF A WHOLE GATHERING WAS BASED UPON THIS BODILY SENSING YOU ARE DOING RIGHT NOW with others in this room? This openness to whatever emerges, protecting every voice in you from anything that would criticize it, suspending what you already know so something new can emerge, trusting a process that is more than can be easily described ... Bracketing all assumptions of what should happen, letting go of scripts for being together, putting to one side our usual forms of organising and our rationalising of these forms, protecting anything creative that emerges.

It might help to imagine a particular kind of organizing, a group you already belong to, a teaching group, a conference..... what would that kind of group look like if it were run purely on Focusing principles, the same attitude and bodily sensing that you know inside yourself? What if the group was 'the body' and each person a 'part' of that bodily process? What if the conference was the body?

4. Break into smaller groups of 3. Each person gets 5 minutes to explicate their felt sense of what feels most important to them in the group issue, while 2 people listen deeply, silently, in a felt sensing way.
5. Then each listener gets 1 minute to tell the Focuser what came to them as they listened. Each Focuser gets 2 responses to their session. In these responses the Focuser gets to sense their angle more clearly in response to the feedback from others - so it's still the Focusers turn, but to resonate with what came for their listeners. You don't need to agree with what your listeners share about your session. Don't get into a discussion at this point, just receive any input from your Listeners, then move on.
6. After each small group is finished, 20 minutes, take another 10 minutes or so to discuss or be together however you want to... Have a look at what others have written, see what excites you and what doesn't.
7. Gather all these fresh angles on to flip chart papers in the main group.
8. Each person takes time to sense which 'facet' feels most exciting to them. It may not be their own. Some of these ideas about what is most important in the feeling of the social would likely go together as having very similar themes – It's kind of like a phenomenological study where each 'felt sense meaning unit' gets to stand on its own and/or be gathered into a theme with other fsmu's.

- As you can guess, the process continues back and forth between small interest groups and bringing back how these small groups are carrying forward their facet through felt sensing round robins and reporting this to the whole group. THIS IS VERY SIMILAR TO OPEN SPACE BUT WITH FOCUSING ADDED.

- Each time the groups report back, each person sensing freshly which group feels most exciting. Group timings become longer so people can sense more deeply into a facet.
- After the initial Focusing-Listening check in, no one stays in a group longer than it feels like an exciting edge for them. Membership of small groups is mobile. Any facet might 'stall' if no one feels its exciting any more, but it is recorded so its not lost.
- At the end of each small group caucus the group members take a few minutes to sense 'are we a WE'? And if so, 'are we coming up with an action step of some kind, or what still needs to come before an action step would feel ok? Action steps are always presented to the whole group for felt sensing but not for censoring or stopping. Someone involved in an action step will report back to the whole group how it went. The group is like a 'network' of groups and a network of 'individuals'. It is not a 'collective'.
- This is a kind of embodied thinking but instead of focusing and felt sensing on a personal interest, it's a social situation. 'Social Action at the Edge' of what is easily verbalised and conceptualised.
- It is analogous to waves on the ocean. Each small group is a 'functional wave'. It never separates from the ocean from which it arose. The ocean constantly gives rise to fresh waves that always return to the whole and arise again... Functional waves - making explicit their constant connection to the living whole.
- And of course people can leave at any time. People can join at any time but they likely need to learn Focusing and listening first.

What would be the difference?

1. No Majority-rule voting
2. No Insistence that members of a group remain together doing the same thing at the same time (regardless of where each person's energy is)?
3. No Hierarchical structure and standardisation.
4. No Certificates and levels of membership. No "Quality" control. No Central decision-making. No need for Competition between members.
5. Conferences. Can we have conferences organised around a trust in the Focusing process itself? We want to protect what could arise from the body, why not do that when we come together at conferences?:
 No Keynote speakers.
 No Prepared 'talks' read to an audience.
 No Workshop topic and agenda prepared in advance.
 No Topics decided by individuals based upon their personal interests long before the conference.
6. Teaching Focusing - Can we teach it as an instance of itself, consistent with trusting the process, or do we have to impose

structure and content, levels, steps... ? Can we teach by modelling and pointing to the process rather than teaching content?

7. In this model I don't think there would be much stability, no central set of rules and demands and little need for centralised funding.
8. We could have interactions that speak more from the heart in the moment rather than the head of the past or future.

What is the dynamic between the individual and the collective?

Between the isolated individual in capitalism and the allegiance to the collective in socialism, there is a responsive interactional space for collaboration and generative action.

Everything I hear of group Focusing still seems to prioritise the individual.

Social Focusing is about processing further what is meaningful to us as persons involved with other persons, but that is not a purely 'personal' issue from our own stuck lives. Not therapy. Not individual Focusing.

Individual Focusing	Social Focusing
Attention to bodily experience.	Attention to bodily experience of self and group situation both, first clearing a space for personal concerns to be marked and set aside.
Pausing, giving time for something to form.	Pausing internally and group pausing to allow a sense of the situation/issue to form.
Acknowledging all that is there without preconceptions about what is important.	Acknowledging all that is there internally and in the group without preconceptions about what is important or what action should be taken.
Setting aside all that is known in order to encounter experiencing freshly (phenomenology).	Setting aside what is already assumed, known, preconceptions about what should happen in the group, spontaneity valued more than agenda. Acknowledging traditional ways of doing things so that something un-traditional can be welcomed and given attention as a creative possibility.
Not imposing on the bodily experience.	Not imposing on the group. Maximum freedom for unpredictable steps to arise, for people to freely pursue other aspects of the issue or meeting. Not everyone has to do the same thing. No one has to subordinate themselves to a small sub-group or sub-agenda that is not consistent with their own passion.
Every part of the person gets heard.	Every part of the person AND every person gets heard, not the loudest voice but any voice that is present. Group works to overcome 'privileged' voices or most educated or experts or most experienced etc voices dominating over others. Actively invite quiet people to contribute.
Resonating anything that comes from the process back with the felt sense	Bringing any idea, potential action, suggestion back to the group, or sub-group to resonate, following the back and forth zig-zag between what emerges and where it emerges from. Not to get caught running away with an idea and leaving the feeling behind - unless there is a subgroup that wants that.

<p>Focusing occurs when attention is given to step by step experiential unfolding that does not have to follow logical protocols.</p>	<p>Social Focusing occurs when issues/ decisions are taken as being framed temporarily and always open to being re-framed, re-understood, each step honoured if it feels right in some way to some one. Each person gets time to unfold their sense of the shared situation so that a more-than-logical process can occur for each person and for the group as a whole. Sub-groups can take on a life of their own.</p>
<p>A decision in the body feels good or right-enough to each part of the person.</p>	<p>A decision is consensual in that each person feels good-enough about the decision. Niggles and objections are heard and their wisdom brought back to the group for further processing. The final decision is either by consent or with objections as long as no objection has the strength of a 'block'. If block is repeatedly used, can a portion of the group proceed and report back regularly to the whole group? No decision should be imposed upon everyone.</p>
<p>Minimal structure is needed to 'hold' the session and to create a space for the process to freely unfold itself.</p>	<p>The group needs some shared agreements about structure and about no-structure so that a culture of 'process' rather than just 'content' is invited.</p>
<p>We attend to more than can be easily said. Complexity is welcomed by staying with the whole feeling rather than only what explicitly arises from it.</p>	<p>At the social or organisational level this may be the most challenging aspect - inviting a group to stay with the whole complexity and to resist quick conclusions, assumptions, premature action, superficial ideology... We need to avoid making 'the explicit' into rigid structure that can limit and bind everyone, for all time.</p>
<p>We keep going from the implicit to the explicit, checking what comes from the body back with the body for a felt sense of resonance.</p>	<p>We keep going back and forth between facets of understand of an issue and the felt sensing of the issue together - back and forth from small groups to the larger group and back, refining our interests and understanding without anything becoming concretised for the whole group.</p>