

# **Examining four styles of Focusing – the similarities and differences**

## **By Angela Hicks**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background to why I chose this project**

I first practised Focusing having learned from Eugene Gendlin's book in the late 1980's (Gendlin, 1978 & 2003). At that time I did solo-Focusing – usually when I had an uncomfortable feeling inside that I didn't understand. I found that often helped me to resolve the way I was feeling. It also gave me insights leading me to feel different and more peaceful inside. I hadn't been to any class and my Focusing was quite simplistic but it worked very well. Later when I read Ann Weiser Cornell's book (Weiser Cornell, 1996) it clarified Focusing for me still more.

It was only in 2003 that I decided to find out more about Focusing and found Barbara McGavin via the web. I was surprised and delighted that my sessions with her deepened my Focusing considerably. I'd had a breast lump for a number of years – I knew it was benign but it never went away. Two months after starting Focusing with Barbara it had disappeared. I also felt better in many other ways. I was sold on Focusing and wanted to find out more.

At this point I decided to learn Focusing more formally from Barbara McGavin and organised a group that she ran. Barbara seemed to teach Focusing differently from the way I had been doing it from books. Although some parts were familiar, the steps seemed different and I was surprised that from the outset she taught us to do it with a companion. Her co-written book (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003) helped me to understand this different style and was very useful. I was curious about what was similar and what was different and I couldn't always put my finger on it. I would sometimes go back to some of the 'old' style Focusing I'd previously used, especially when I was solo-Focusing. To get to 'deeper' parts or if I was working with a companion I'd use the 'new' style I'd learned with Barbara.

My curiosity about the different styles as well as a desire to know everything about Focusing in order to understand it better has been the motivation behind this project.

#### **The project**

This piece of writing follows a project looking at the similarities and differences between four styles of Focusing. The styles I'm comparing are the ones I think are the main styles currently taught within the Focusing community. The styles are what I call 'Basic' Focusing, Inner Relationship Focusing, Bio Spiritual Focusing and Wholebody Focusing.

#### **These four styles**

'Basic' Focusing is a name I give to what Eugene Gendlin originally taught. This is probably the most commonly used style and is the basis for all other Focusing styles.

'Inner Relationship' Focusing was originated by Ann Weiser Cornell (an early student of Eugene Gendlin) in the US and Barbara McGavin (a Focusing teacher since the early 1980s) in the UK. As the name suggests it involves being in a relationship with our inner self.

'Bio Spiritual' Focusing was originated by two Jesuit priests - Peter Campbell and Edwin McMahon, (they too first learned from Eugene Gendlin). As the name implies this is a spiritual approach to Focusing and Catholics and Quakers as well as people from other religions, such as Buddhists, use it. People do not have to be religious to use this style, however, and Lesley Wilson who I spoke to about it is not a member of any formal religious group.

Kevin McEvenue, a Focuser from Toronto, started ‘Wholebody’ Focusing. He was originally trained as an Alexandra Technique practitioner. He combined Focusing with his previous knowledge of bodywork. This style involves allowing the Focuser to reintegrate issues by allowing the body to express itself physically. Although it uses the basic stages of Focusing it is probably the most outwardly different of the four styles. Kevin McEvenue only teaches this style of Focusing to people who are fairly experienced Focusers in other styles.

### **Outcomes for this project**

Some outcomes for this project are to explore:

- The similarities and differences between the different styles of Focusing
- What each style of practise brings to Focusing
- What I might integrate into my own Focusing practise

I have tried to be as objective and even-handed as possible whilst looking at the different styles – especially as I respect each for what they have brought to Focusing. For this reason I hope that any comments are taken in the spirit they are written – one of interest and curiosity.

### **How I set about this project**

This project was written as part of my practitioner training with Barbara McGavin. Following conversations with both Barbara McGavin and Rob Foxcroft I also talked with three other people. I visited Lesley Wilson, the Regional Co-ordinator for the Institute of Bio Spiritual Research and a teacher of Bio Spiritual Focusing. I talked with her in-depth then had a Focusing session.

I spoke for one hour via transatlantic phone call to Bebe Simon. She assisted Eugene Gendlin in his workshops for many years from the 1970s onwards and is a teacher of Focusing. One week later I then had a phone Focusing session with her.

My experience of Inner Relationship Focusing comes from over three years of regular Focusing sessions with Barbara McGavin. I’ve also attended two sets of Focusing courses and many extra one-day seminars, plus as a week-long ‘Treasure Maps’ workshop with Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell. I also had specific conversations with Barbara McGavin about various aspects of Focusing after I had started this project as, unsurprisingly, it had brought up many other questions.

Originally I wasn’t going to include Wholebody Focusing in this project but on discussion with Lesley Wilson I decided to include it. To find out more about it I visited Addie van der Kooy. Addie van der Kooy regularly practises Wholebody Focusing and he co-presents Wholebody Focusing workshops when Kevin McEvenue teaches in the UK.

## **FOCUSING AND THE DIFFERENT STYLES**

### **What is Focusing?**

Most people reading this will know what Focusing is, but for anyone who doesn’t, this is a brief explanation and history. Focusing is a process that enables us resolve any issues we have and move forward in our lives (or live forward). It is used in many contexts including therapy, bodywork, writing, business and art. Focusing is very practical and is best taught experientially.

To Focus, the Focuser gets a whole sense within the body what s/he Focusing on (felt sense). As the Focuser sits with the felt sense a symbol arises (a handle). The Focuser then fine-tunes the symbol/handle until it matches the felt sense. This is likely to create an internal and positive shift. With this shift comes a change in the way

the felt sense is held in the body which in turn leads to a change in the Focuser's perception and a forward movement in the way the issue is dealt with.

Eugene Gendlin discovered the Focusing process. As a philosopher and lecturer at the University of Chicago he and his colleagues studied thousands of therapy sessions that were recorded on tape. Some sessions used classical therapy and others used newer therapies. As he watched he realised that people didn't change because of the *type* of therapy they were having but because of something they were doing internally. What he saw was that as they did the therapy they were checking inside themselves for the 'rightness' of what they were sensing. The people who checked inside themselves tended to have successful therapy no matter what style of therapy they did. Those who didn't do this did not change. (Gendlin 1978, pp 3 – 4 and Weiser Cornell, 1998 pp 3 – 4.) Gendlin wanted to find a way to teach his discovery and developed six Focusing stages to do this.

### **What is common to all Focusing?**

There are certain aspects of Focusing that all styles strive to teach. These are that:

1. The body has an inner wisdom of its own. We can sense inside the body to experience both positive and negative feelings. By allowing these feelings to speak we can deal with any of our own personal issues that we knowingly or unknowingly have.
2. When we Focus these feelings or issues form a 'felt sense' or a 'something' inside us. This usually starts off fuzzy and unclear and becomes clearer as we Focus. This felt sense arises from the body but is more than just a body sensation.
3. We sit *with* the felt sense rather than *in* it. This allows us to have some distance and to embrace whatever comes up and to allow 'it' to reveal itself and to shift.
4. The body will work at its own pace and it reveals things to us in its own time. The process can't be pushed and we can't force it to move quicker than it wants to go - which can be quite slowly.
5. We 'find a handle' or 'symbolise' the felt sense and then go back and forth between the felt sense and the handle/symbol checking how they resonate with each other. This can also be described as 'making sure it fits' or 'allowing it to express itself'.
6. The resonance allows a shift to occur as the issue resolves itself. This shift can be felt in the body and may be small and subtle or more obvious. This often allows a new direction to form in our life process.
7. Focusing takes us in what Gendlin calls a 'life forward' direction. In other words it helps us to take ourselves forward towards what is life-enhancing and energy giving (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p A-16).

## **DISCUSSION ABOUT THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE THREE MAIN STYLES**

### **How I have divided up the steps**

Eugene Gendlin described six basic steps in the Focusing process but to make it easier to compare styles I have divided them into four basic steps, phases or movements based loosely on those used in Weiser Cornell, A., McGavin, B., 2003, which are:

- The first step/movement – Coming in; clearing a space (by taking an inventory)
- The second step/movement – Making contact; allowing a felt sense to form; or letting go into it
- The third step/movement – Deepening contact; finding a handle and resonating; allowing it to express itself
- The fourth step/movement - Coming out; receiving; nurturing; sensing for a stopping place

Due to the nature of Focusing many of the steps/movements overlap and may be carried out simultaneously. This attempt to compare the four styles in terms of the steps or movements cannot adequately reflect the complexity of what goes on in each Focuser or the process that they are going through as they Focus.

### Focusing using the different styles

Below is a table showing of the different steps, phases or movements of the four main styles of Focusing. I will then discuss each step in depth.

Basic Focusing	Inner relationship Focusing	Bio Spiritual Focusing	Wholebody Focusing
<b>Step/Movement 1</b>			
1. Clear a space	1. Coming in. Bringing awareness into the body and sensing or inviting what wants your awareness now and waiting for something to come.	1. Clearing a space by taking an inventory 2. Feeling which is number one	1. Grounding and presence
<b>Step/movement 2</b>			
2. Allow a felt sense to form	2. Making contact. Describing it. Acknowledging it. Finding the kind of contact it would like.	3. Is it OK to be with this?	2. Allowing a felt sense to emerge
		4. Letting go into it, just being in it, sensing the whole of it	
<b>Step/movement 3</b>			
3. Find a handle	3. Deepening contact. Settling down with it. Keeping it company. Sensing in the body. Symbols emerging.	5. Allowing it to express itself (this includes the next step of 'asking' and 'finding if it is OK to stop')	3. Holding each with equal positive regard (this includes the third step resonating by watching the dynamic arising from holding both equally)
4. Go back and forth between the felt sense and the handle until a 'match; is found.	4. Resonating and adjusting.		
5. Asking. Ask a question or questions of the felt sense	5. Sensing its point of view. Letting it know you hear it		

<b>Step/movement 4</b>			
6. Receiving. Receive and welcome what came, and be glad it spoke. Realise this is only one step in the problem, let it know you are willing to come back, protect it from critical voices that interrupt	6 Coming out. Sensing for a stopping place. Receiving and experiencing what has changed. Letting it know you're willing to come back. Thanking. Bringing awareness out	6 Nurturing – before and after checking, savouring the moment. Time to say thanks: grounding in the spiritual body	4. Nurturing or coming to a resting place

## **THE FIRST STEP - CLEARING A SPACE OR COMING IN BY SCANNING THE BODY**

### **What's important about the first step?**

The first step of Focusing is finding something to be Focused on that can then 'tell its own story'. There is no one way of doing this. Both Eugene Gendlin (Gendlin 1978 and 2003, page 52) and Bio Spiritual Focusing (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 149) describe a first step called 'Clearing a Space' in their books. All Focusers I spoke to, however, said clearing a space is optional and that a Focusing session can be commenced in many different ways. These include starting with 'an agenda' (an issue to be Focused on), beginning with a feeling (which is often, but not always, uncomfortable), or by scanning the body then inviting something to come into awareness.<sup>1</sup>

Bebe Simon told me:

'Originally when Gene wrote the book he taught Clearing a Space. He thought it was a way to prepare. We have found out that there's more to it and it's also not necessary.'

Lesley Wilson commented:

'We do 'finding a space by taking an inventory' but they didn't teach it much in the retreat. At the start of the session doing anything to get into it is fine.'

Because Clearing a Space is described in the books above, I have discussed it in this section. I have also discussed a body scan, which is used in the Inner Relationship and the Wholebody focusing styles.

**Basic Focusing.** To 'clear a space' Gendlin recommends first relaxing then feeling inwardly into the body especially the chest or stomach area<sup>2</sup>. He then suggests asking a question such as, 'How is my life going?' 'What's between me and feeling fine?' or 'What's bugging me right now?' (Gendlin 1978 and 2003, pp 52, 72 and 173). The Focuser can then stop and let the body slowly answer.

Once an answer has come Gendlin instructs us to stand back from it so that there is space between it and ourselves. We then put it to one side and ask the same kind of question again. He says to stack up the answers. At the same time we should stay 'cheerfully detached' (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, pp 53). Once this has been completed the final question is 'Except for that am I fine?' Having completed this we select one personal

<sup>1</sup> In the video 'Focusing with Eugene Gendlin' the sessions of him demonstrating Focusing all show the Focuser starting with an issue or feeling.

<sup>2</sup> In a later book Eugene Gendlin describes the first stage as a first *check* and calls it, 'Can you feel the middle of your body'. He misses out Clearing a Space altogether (Gendlin 1986).

problem to Focus on. He suggests doing this by asking inside ‘What’s the main thing right now?’ and then waiting for the feelings to emerge (Gendlin 1978 and 2003., p 79). Gendlin comments that clearing a space gives us distance from our problems and also that it can be done alone for its own sake (Gendlin 1978 and 2003, pp 78) and that this can often result in an opening out into a vast space inside.

Bebe Simon comments that:

Someone who hadn’t a problem to work on discovered you could Focus on the clear space. Gene didn’t know. Sometimes when someone is having a difficult time Focusing, clearing a space could take the whole time with them and they couldn’t Focus. I (Bebe) met someone who didn’t appreciate Focusing until they started clearing a space – so it’s different for different people. One person who Focused just spent one hour clearing a space.

**Bio Spiritual Focusing.** Bio Spiritual Focusing as it is described in the book (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, pp) also uses clearing a space as a first step. Campbell and McMahon call it ‘finding a space by taking an inventory’ and suggest that the Focuser asks the question ‘Is there anything in my life keeping me from feeling really good?’ After something has surfaced the authors then propose, as Gendlin does, to put these to one side. They suggest that they can be put on the floor beside us, on a shelf or in a container like a box (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 150). They also suggest asking questions of it such as ‘Does this feel like the one that needs Focusing on right now?’ and letting it know we are willing to come back to it later if it isn’t the one right now.

Campbell and McMahon also emphasise that there might be other things, such as a dream or a challenge, that might be Focused on as well.

Bio Spiritual Focusing’s step two which is ‘Feeling which is number one?’ is also a part of the coming in process.<sup>3</sup> Once an inventory has been made, emphasis is put on the wisdom of the body finding which one of the choices to work with. This may be, for example, the heaviest, the one that hurts the most, or the one that has the most energy or is the most exciting (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 153).

When I asked Lesley Wilson about starting the Focusing process she commented:

‘You can Focus on what is there right now. You might start with an agenda. With a new person you might get them to go inside and ‘notice how you are today’ then say ‘as you’re doing that maybe something specific is asking for your attention.’ You may then talk until the obvious thing comes up.

It also says in the Bio Spiritual Focusing book to ‘be ready to skip steps 1 and 2 if the issue to be Focused on is clearly evident. For example if something upsetting has just happened. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 170).

**Inner Relationship Focusing.** This style does not include clearing a space as a step although it is mentioned in a chapter of the Manual, (McGavin and Weiser Cornell 2002, Chapter 7 page 83). Ann Weiser Cornell, writes about her history in relation to clearing a space and makes it clear that her relationship with it has evolved over the years. Having moved through something called ‘finding distance’ she later realised that it was unnecessary if we are in ‘presence’ with our felt sense (Weiser Cornell, A., 2005, page 207). Barbara McGavin has also commented about this. She spent so long practicing this step that for a while she didn’t get into the Focusing process itself – hence she preferred to drop it.

Instead of Clearing a Space, the Inner Relationship style suggests starting the Focusing process by bringing awareness into the body – this is usually done with a short or long body scan. There are two ways this can be done. In one, emphasized by Barbara McGavin, the Focuser notices how different areas of the body feel. This process is carried out slowly so that by the end the Focuser can sense what wants her/his attention, or is able to allow something such as a body sensation, an emotion, a thought or an image or any other ‘something’ to arise

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<sup>3</sup> This contrasts with Basic Focusing, which does not have a separate step for this.

that may lead into a felt sense. In the other way of starting with the body, emphasized by Ann Weiser Cornell, the body scan may take only a minute or two, starting with the outer areas of the body and completing in the inner areas: throat, chest, stomach, belly. Then the Focuser invites a felt sense to form by asking "What wants my awareness now?" or by thinking of a life issue, and then inviting a felt sense of it.

### **Wholebody Focusing**

The first step of a Wholebody Focusing session is called 'grounding'. This is the only style of Focusing that is commenced standing up (although it can begin sitting down if the Focuser prefers). To start a Wholebody Focusing session the Focuser may turn her/his attention to the feet and notice how they feel on the floor.<sup>4</sup>

Focusing with the Whole Body (Van Der Kooy, A., 2006, p 12) says:

'Grounding' is a very simple procedure by which you take time to deliberately focus your attention on the feet (and sitting bones if you are sitting) to allow a felt sense to emerge of your body being supported on the ground (and the chair if sitting). The Focuser then invites her/his whole body to 'let go to how it is holding itself'.

In order to encourage this sense of letting go, the Focuser scans the body from the feet upwards. The Focuser is then asked to allow a symbol for the whole sense of her/his body to emerge. Out of this the Focuser gains a sense of being present to her/his whole body.

### **Summary of step one**

The most commonly used methods of bringing awareness into the body seem to be 'clearing a space' or a body scan. If an issue or a feeling is already present, clearing a space or a body scan may be unnecessary. Although Clearing a Space is described in Eugene Gendlin's book, it is not part of his original discovery about how people change through therapy (page 3 above) and most Focusers say that it does not have to be a part of the Focusing process.

Rob Foxcroft's article 'Twenty Ways to Start a Focusing Session' (Focusing Connection Vol.XXIII, No. 2, Mar 2006) emphasises this. In it he said that there is no set way to begin – only preferred ways used by different styles. To underline this Rob Foxcroft says, 'If anyone tells you that one of these (methods of beginning a session) is right please complain.'

It seems to me that the method of starting a session doesn't really matter. The most important thing is that the Focuser starts the session and in such a way that s/he can 'be with' what is being Focused on. Below however, is a discussion about the positive aspects of each of the main methods.

### **Some considerations about each method of coming in to Focusing;**

#### ***Clearing a Space***

- This gives us an agenda or an issue to be used at the start of the session.
- It can also be useful because something unexpected or a surprise issue may pop into the inventory, usually this is an uninvited element that 'flies by the periphery of your consciousness' it may be an image, the memory of some painful or embarrassing situation or perhaps the painful anticipation of something that will happen tomorrow'. These are like 'catching something out of the corner of your eye' and they can be treasures leading towards a deeper resolution in bodily knowing (Bio Spirituality, 1997, p 26).
- It is useful to give us a way to prevent ourselves from becoming merged and/or overwhelmed by our responses to issues and allows the issue to become an 'it' in relation to ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> This is method of grounding may be used as a starting point as it makes it easier to access a sense of the whole body but the Focuser can also find their own way of grounding that works for them.

- It can give us a sense of all of the issues that might be Focused upon and we can thereby set them down and not suspect we are missing an important issue when we are Focusing (although if we were I'm sure it would come up anyway!)
- We can Clear a Space for it's own sake and find we are in a vast space inside us (Gendlin 1978, pp78) – and then Focus on something later or Focus on the cleared space itself.

### ***Scanning the Body***

An alternative to Clearing a Space is scanning the body as is used in Inner relationship Focusing and Wholebody Focusing.

- Scanning the body often leads us to a bodily feeling to be Focused on
- Scanning is very immediate and is a simple way of starting a session especially if there is no agenda
- Scanning the body may allow something totally unexpected to arise because it allows something to emerge through the body rather than using a predetermined issue. This encourages the Focuser to keep an open mind while Focusing as s/he often has no idea what the issue being Focused upon is about.
- Scanning also helps the Focuser to feel her/his body in its entirety and to find where things are flowing smoothly and areas that are asking for attention.

### ***Starting with an agenda/issue or feeling***

Another method of starting a session is to go to just one pressing issue (or agenda item) or a feeling that is already present. To do this the Focuser will notice the whole sense of this as it feels in her/his body.

- An issue or feelings is a useful way for a person to begin a session and helps a new Focuser to understand the next step - a felt sense. People can even compare the felt sense of two different issues or feelings and sense how they form different felt senses in the body.
- An issue or a feeling can also be an important motivating factor when starting a Focusing session. If we have a body sense of a pressing problem we are motivated to deal with the discomfort and this may help us to stay with the process when we first learn to Focus.
- I think it might sometimes be easier to start solo-Focusing if it starts from an agenda or feeling that is already present as it is very immediate. The Focuser may also be highly motivated to stay with the issue, as s/he may be really curious to find out more about it.

## **THE SECOND STEP - ALLOWING A FELT SENSE TO FORM, MAKING CONTACT, OR LETTING GO INTO IT**

Having made contact with what is to be worked on, the next step is to allow a felt sense to form. It is probably one of the most important phases in the Focusing process and can only be *experienced* in the body. Thus it is particularly hard to describe.

### **What is the felt sense and why is it important?**

Contacting this bodily sense or body's 'knowledge' is part of an evolving *process* rather than something that remains static. Eugene Gendlin describes it as 'a sense of the whole problem as it is felt in the body'. As such it is 'pregnant' (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, p 86) - in that it is not immediately open or showing it's meaning *yet*. It is waiting to shift or change.<sup>5</sup>

### **How each style of Focusing describes the felt sense**

#### **Basic Focusing**

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<sup>5</sup> Bebe Simon told me Gene says his biggest concern about Focusing is that people will think that staying with their feelings is Focusing rather than realising the importance of the Felt Sense.

Eugene Gendlin describes the felt sense in some detail in his original book (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, page 53 - 55) and I have written some of his descriptions in the section above. He gives a lot of detail because it is hard to describe a process that often uses metaphor. For example, when describing a felt sense he says, 'You are trying to get down to the single feeling that encompasses *all that* about my 'relationships' or 'quitting my job'. The feeling contains many details just as a piece of music contains many notes' (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, p 56). In a later book (Gendlin 1986) this is described as a second check and is called, 'Can you sense the unclear?' Eugene Gendlin describes it as a murky, unsatisfying, vague, queasy, confused feeling'

Other descriptions Eugene Gendlin uses are:

A holistic, implicit bodily sense of a complex situation' (Gendlin, 1996, p 58).

The holistic, unclear sense of the whole thing (problem). It is something most people would pass by because it is muzzy, fuzzy and vague. When you first stay with it you might think 'Oh that? You want me to stay with that?'(Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, p 55).

### **Bio Spiritual Focusing**

The felt sense as it is described in Bio Spiritual Focusing, is forming when the Focuser asks, 'Is it OK to be with this?' (step 3 of the process) followed by step 4 'Letting go into it' The question 'Is it OK to be with this?' is used for the Focuser to check that there is no resistance to fully feeling the felt sense before letting go into it. If the issue is difficult it is important to create a 'Caring Feeling Presence (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 157) see below under 'being with the felt sense' for more on this.

Lesley Wilson told me,

'It's always important to check if it's OK to be with it. If not there may be something behind it. We then ask 'How does this want you to be with it?' and 'Is there a particular way it wants you to be with it?' Once you have found this there's a step called letting go into it. With caring presence you can allow yourself to feel it. Being in that relationship and being with it. Then sit in silence with it.'

Letting go into it is 'Asking inside, 'How does this whole thing feel in the body right now? How am I carrying it inside me?' and then feeling it exactly as it is and allowing the awareness of it to seep in and to settle in, in order to feel exactly how it is inside.' (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 159). At the same time as doing this they stress that we need to be friendly to difficult feelings and issues (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 38) and embrace them rather than pushing them away. This might involve directly touching the felt carrying of the image or imaging you are holding it on your lap or purposely creating a 'caring feeling presence', which is described below.

Other descriptions of the felt sense used in Bio Spiritual Focusing are:

- A felt sense is much like an electrical power in a wire before the switch is thrown. It is meant to go somewhere, to move, to unfold. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 91).
- The felt sense is the way the body tries to tell us what it knows. This may be through feelings, body sensation and things 'I know but can't yet put into words... therefore my body has it's own words through which it wants to talk to me. There is always a story waiting to be told in my body whenever I notice feelings, sensations and felt senses'. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997 p 144).

### **Inner Relationship Focusing**

Inner Relationship Focusing refers to this step as 'making contact'. Rather than using the term 'felt sense' Inner Relationship Focusing prefers to call it a 'something' or an 'it'. The Focuser describes what s/he is sensing inside and also acknowledges it in some way – thus starting to form a relationship with it. The Focuser then senses what kind of contact 'it' would like? Although the felt sense is not named in the Inner Relationship Focusing Manual, the felt sense is still referred to in the appendix as *the* central term for Focusing. It is explained that it was created by Eugene Gendlin to refer to something experienced which is: 1) Felt in the body, 2) At first unclear, and 3) About something. (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p A-15).

Ann Weiser-Cornell and Barbara McGavin explain that the words ‘felt sense’ is not used in the Manual because people who are learning Focusing tend to get caught up in a self-conscious questioning of whether they are doing it right. They say, ‘We have not found it helpful to encourage people to wonder whether something they are experiencing is a felt sense or not. Instead we have referred to ‘something’ or ‘it’.<sup>6</sup>

Other descriptions of the felt sense used in Inner Relationship Focusing are:

- ‘What’s wanting your awareness might come in any part of the body. It might be something that is already there or something that forms after your awareness is there. It might appear as a body sensation, an emotion, a thought, an image.... (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 7).
- A body sense is one aspect of a felt sense. It is the body sensations that one can describe in terms of the location, intensity, quality. A felt sense has multiple aspects which can be felt into and symbolised: body sense, emotions, connections with something in your life, memories and associations, hopes and fears about the future, thoughts and images – in short a holistic bodily response to something’ ... all of these aspects together create what we experience as meaning’ (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 46).

### **Wholebody Focusing**

Wholebody Focusing refers to this step as ‘allowing a felt sense to emerge’. Having found a sense of being ‘grounded and present’ in the body the Focuser can get a sense of what else is there. As with other styles of Focusing this is ‘something in the body that has a whole body sense of a particular problem or situation’, (Lou N., Whole Body Focusing showing the work of Kevin McEvenue (Video)). From this, something will present itself that wants the Focuser’s attention.. The felt sense may show that it needs our attention physically, for example, a sense of wanting to uncramp, or there may be a pain or discomfort or a sense of ‘something’ in the body. Whatever it is, it is listened to and welcomed. There is also a keen interest or openness to any physical sensations or postures that may need some attention. Particularly, any stirrings or urges that may suggest the beginnings of a spontaneous, inner-directed movement.

### **Being with the felt sense – presence, feeling caring presence or wholebody presence**

We would not be able to be with the felt sense in its movement towards change if we did not have a way of being with any ‘negative or difficult feelings’ that come up in the Focusing process. Being even-handed, neutral or present to it is therefore crucial. Below is a discussion about how this done in the different styles.

### **Basic Focusing**

Eugene Gendlin doesn’t actually give a name to the internal state necessary to keep us from becoming too associated with our process.<sup>7</sup> He does, however, discuss the necessity of ‘standing back’ from the felt sense (e.g., Gendlin 1998, p 44). He also talks about pushing the problems a little distant from ourselves (Gendlin 1998, p 47) and as discussed above, sees the step of clearing a space as a way of creating the necessary distance (Gendlin 1998, p 72). When I asked Bebe Simon about the concept I knew as ‘presence’ her response was, ‘The word ‘presence’ doesn’t fit for me. I don’t use it. I talk to a person and keep it open. Gene doesn’t do it either’.

Although Eugene Gendlin doesn’t actually give it a name he does discuss being caring towards parts that are difficult to be with and suggests ‘learning to be with your feeling like a hurting child’ (Campbell and McMahan, 1985, p 7).

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<sup>6</sup> After writing this I spoke to Barbara about why she and Ann don’t use the term ‘felt sense’ in the manual. Everything is evolving and Barbara and Ann have obviously become aware of this lack of description and it may precipitate the rewriting of the manual – or a supplement. She also said that she is starting to bring it more into her teaching again. She said that it had been said that if people had it described in too much detail they start wondering ‘have I got a felt sense?’ rather than experiencing it and ‘they then overlook the portals that will take them to a felt sense’. She also thinks that ‘When we give an explanation it is easy to think we understand but it can have a flattening effect’. There is obviously a fine line between describing and experiencing this process.

<sup>7</sup> I have been told, however, that the term ‘The Focusing attitude’ is sometimes used.

## **Bio Spiritual**

This style describes 'caring feeling presence'. This is discussed in depth in chapter 7 of 'The Myth of Dominance, An Alternative to a Violent Society'. (McMahon, 1993, ch 7, pp 113 – 135). He describes caring feeling presence as 'an umbrella term to describe a wide range of body approaches which help us to become reconciled with feelings that we have made into our enemy' (McMahon, 1993, ch 7, pp 121). This may range from suggesting to the Focuser to imagine the caring and affectionate feelings we once had for a beloved pet or toy or a small child. They are tailored to the individual, for example a person who worked within the justice system found it easy to give a part she rejected a 'fair hearing' as she might do in court. 'Anything that allows kinship with the feeling and creates a more open caring, gentle inner climate or body attitude rather than a rejecting, repressing, ignoring or numbing one.' (Campbell and McMahon, 1985, p 157).

## **Inner relationship**

Being in a state of 'Presence' lies at the heart of Inner Relationship Focusing. The word was first used by Barbara McGavin (Felt Sensing; Strands and Voices, Rob Foxcroft, May 2004, Vol. XXL, No. 3) and is designed to create a climate of safety and trust within the Focuser. It allows us to be present with anything in our experience with interest and compassion. It is written about in depth in The Focusing Student's and Companion's Manual, (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, Ch 5, pp 55 – 60 and Ch. 10, pp 155 - 186).

There are many qualities to presence such as 'open, compassionate, non-judgemental, interested, spacious, allowing, having no agenda, balanced, empathic, available .... (for a list see Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p A-3). Presence can be cultivated as we Focus and we can use language that supports it such as 'I'm sensing..', 'I'm aware of...', 'I'm noticing...' or adding 'I'm sensing (aware of, noticing,) something ....' etc. Presence is really a state of *being* rather than a part of ourselves (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, Ch 5, pp 56) and by being in this state we can hold and contain any negativity that arises in our Focusing process. We can also support presence by acknowledging our 'something' or felt sense and allowing ourselves to sit with it rather than pushing it away. This develops an atmosphere through which a part of us can feel safe enough to communicate with us.

Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser-Cornell also explain that there are three possible states of being when we are Focusing. These are to be 'merged' with something - when we totally identify with it (for example, I'm angry or I'm hurt), to be 'exiled' or 'dissociated' from something - when we deny it's existence even though it is clearly there (for example, I'm not angry or I'm not hurt). If we are in presence as described in Inner relationship Focusing we are in a state of equanimity.

## **Wholebody Focusing**

This style of Focusing also encourages a focuser to be in a state called 'presence' (called 'wholebody presence'). Wholebody presence is encouraged by enabling the Focuser to feel safe and grounded in her/his body. The Focuser may feel 'in the moment, relaxed, grounded or sitting in her/his own empowerment, or a sense of 'this is me'' (Lou N., Whole Body Focusing showing the work of Kevin McEvenue (Video)). The whole is contained in the part so this larger bodily sense of self guides, supports and welcomes the felt sense as it emerges.<sup>8</sup>

## **Summary of step two**

**The Felt Sense.** This step of developing the felt sense 'or 'something' or 'letting go into it' is a crucial step in the Focusing process. It is difficult to describe, as it is very much a process. The main thing about it is that it is initially fuzzy and unclear and it is 'pregnant' with the possibility of change.

The main distinctions between different ways of describing the felt sense are small and are usually based on the language used to describe the process. Because it is so unclear, Inner Relationship Focusing describes it as an

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that the word 'presence' is used in other self-awareness contexts. For instance it is used in the book, 'The Power of Now' where it states, 'Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the now' (Tolle Eckhart, 2002).

'it' or a 'something'. In his article, Felt Sensing: Strands and Voices (The Focusing Connection, May 2004, Vol. XX, No. 3), Rob Foxcroft also says that he doesn't like to talk about the felt sense because 'I start worrying about if this is a felt-sense, or a sensation, or an emotion or a gut feeling, I am immediately in 'in my head'. I am cut off from feeling and from myself.'

Although what is said above is true and too much description can be often limiting, in my opinion *not* describing the felt sense has its own repercussions. It can lead the new Focuser having no idea about an important part of the Focusing process and can result in her/him just sitting with a sensation or an emotion instead of all the fuzzy, muzzy strands that the felt sense involves. Rob Foxcroft points out that this step is more about 'felt sensing' – a verb rather than a felt sense – a noun. Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin are planning to start using the term 'felt sense' again in their future writing and Ann Weiser Cornell uses the term Felt Sensing in her article 'How to Tell if You're Focusing (The Focusing Connection, September 2006, Vol. XXIII, No. 5). I look forward to reading more about this as it is clearly, an evolving process....

***Being with the Felt Sense/presence.*** As well as describing the felt sense, all four styles have looked for and described a way to 'be with' the felt sense in a caring but unbiased way. The Gendlin style of Focusing is the only one that does not use the word 'presence' to describe this state, although Ann Weiser Cornell (Ann Weiser Cornell, How to tell When You're Focusing, The Focusing Connection, September 2006), mentions that Bebe Simon was beautifully consistent about how to speak to a felt sense in the early years (and therefore to be *with* it). She was careful to say, 'can you ask *it* what it needs, long before the rest of us had an inkling it was important'.

Each style uses different ways to get into and remain in 'presence'. As described above Inner Relationship Focusing has elegant linguistic ways of finding and maintaining presence by using the words, *sensing, aware of, noticing* etc. Wholebody Focusing presence constitutes a bodily sense as it is felt in the body in the present moment. This sense is separate from any thoughts and feelings, has its own felt sense.<sup>9</sup> Bio Spiritual Focusing brings in a state of '*caring, feeling*' presence. This gives the Focuser the sense of putting a comforting and affectionate arm around part that has been traumatised. It is also important to note than although Eugene Gendlin does not use the term 'caring feeling presence' the idea of 'learning to be with your feeling like a hurting child' comes from him (see above).

### **THE THIRD STEP – FINDING A HANDLE AND RESONATING; DEEPENING CONTACT, RESONATING AND ADJUSTING; ALLOWING IT TO EXPRESS ITSELF; HOLDING EACH WITH POSITIVE REGARD**

Focusing is by its nature very imprecise and all 'steps' overlap. Some styles have four steps and others six so in some styles this part has quite a few steps to it.

The next phase of the Focusing process is to find a 'handle' (Basic Focusing) or 'symbolisation' (Bio Spiritual and Inner Relationship Focusing) or 'holding each with positive regard' (Wholebody Focusing). It involves waiting or sitting with the felt sense and allowing the symbol to arise. The felt sense will, in its own time open up and give the focuser a symbol.

The symbol that arises varies from Focuser to Focuser and may be a word, a phrase, an image, a gesture a giggle or anything that represents the felt sense (this means it can be gobbledygook too). Sometimes this symbol may start out not quite 'fitting' or matching the felt sense and will adjust to get a better match. This process of adjusting is called resonating or resonating and adjusting. In Wholebody Focusing the sense of the body and the felt sense are held in equal regard allowing a symbol to arise and there is also an openness to any kind of movement (external or interior) as a symbol that arises from the felt sense. This may be initially very vague and

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<sup>9</sup> Sometimes a Wholebody Focusing session can be all about letting the felt sense of the Focuser's presence tell its story.

seemingly insignificant but may move into a meaningful posture that will then be able to tell its story through other symbols, like words, images, sounds, etc.

At the beginning of a session the symbol is usually an imprecise fit. It may be a vague feeling such as, 'sort of' angry or 'sort of' hurt. The closer the Focuser gets to fully symbolising the felt sense, the more precise the symbol becomes. There are usually small bodily shifts as the Focusing session progresses. These shifts indicate whether the session is moving forward in the right direction or not and the Focuser can adjust accordingly. Once there is a final symbolisation (described by Gendlin as the 'Direct Referent') a final bodily shift may be felt.

### **What's important about this phase?**

It is important to remember that this phase might involve a lot of patience and there is often a sense of not knowing what is going on. Rob Foxcroft described it to me as 'getting messy'. Nowadays when I Focus and I go into the stage when I don't know what is happening and I feel tempted to stop I take it as a sign that the process is moving forward in a positive way and I feel happy to continue sitting in this messiness knowing that in time it will resolve itself.<sup>10</sup>

A second important thing about this stage is that the symbol often carries a surprise element. 'Symbols that arise are always different from what you deliberately think.' (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 43). They will also often carry a shift in the body with them. The shift changes the way the body carries the problem.

The shift always feels positive. As a participant at a Bio Spiritual Focusing course said, 'what I'm Focusing on might be painful but it always feels good when the right symbol comes that fits my felt sense'. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 45).

### **This is how this step/movement is described by each style of Focusing**

#### **Basic Focusing.**

These are the third, fourth and fifth steps of the Focusing Process that are described in Eugene Gendlin's book (Gendlin E., 1978 and 2003). The first part of this phase is to *find a handle*. As described above this might be a word, a phrase or a picture or just a 'sense' of the felt sense. Eugene Gendlin says 'let the pictures or words come from the feeling and let it label itself; 'scared' or a 'stiff place inside me' or 'a heavy feeling here' (Gendlin E, 1978 and 2003). As we find a handle our attention is on our body and this might involve getting 'warmer' or 'colder' as described in a children's game of hide and seek. When a match is found he describes that 'the whole sense stirs and eases a little' (Gendlin E, Focusing, 1978 and 2003) until there is a 'sense of relief' when it fits.

Having found the handle this is *shifted back and forth* with the felt sense until there is a resonance. Gendlin says that it is important to make sure that it is a perfect fit. He then says that if this sense of it being 'just right' doesn't come, to wait and let more exact words come to fit the feeling. To do this there is a sort of going back and forth between the felt sense and the handle. Sometimes at this stage the felt sense may disappear and he then suggests 'you say the word gently over and over, in the spirit of trying to feel directly what the words were about', then after 10 – 20 seconds it comes back. Following this, let both sides – the feeling and the words - do whatever they do until the match is just right. Once a perfect match is felt allow it to just *be*. The body will now be changing releasing, moving etc.

Eugene Gendlin's fifth stage is called *asking*. He suggests that this may be unnecessary if there has been a big shift at the previous step. If more is needed however, the Focuser can ask a question directly of the felt sense. If the word was 'uneasy', for example, the Focuser might ask 'What is the whole problem that makes me so uneasy?' Two other questions he suggests are 'What is the worst of this?' and 'What does the felt sense need?'

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<sup>10</sup> It reminds me of the transition phase in labour. When the mother-to-be wants to stop and give up, it is a clear sign that the baby is about to be born.

He emphasises that the body shift *always* feels good even if what has arisen from the process may not seem very positive.

The shift discussed by Eugene Gendlin is not described in all styles of Focusing. When I first started Focusing it was the shift that convinced me that something was happening and I think Gendlin describes it very elegantly.

Eugene Gendlin describes this stage of not knowing what is going on (described above) in *Let Your Body Interpret your Dreams* (Gendlin, E, 1986). He calls this the Fourth check: 'Can you stay over and over again or can you return over and over'. Here Gendlin describes the messiness when he says, 'I worry that you may quit in a minute of two' and later, 'Before the shift comes one has trouble staying with it because it is so murky. Right after it opens and shifts it is wonderful.'

### **Bio Spiritual Focusing**

Having let go into the felt sense and embraced it exactly as it is, the next step is called *allowing it to express itself*. This symbolising phrase is described as 'staying with the body-feel of an issue until sooner or later it expresses itself in some symbol that fits and feels right (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 160). As described above it may be any symbol (a word, phrase, image, memory, tears, a giggle etc.) as long it connects in some way to the issue being Focused upon so that there is some easing that then takes place or feeling of 'rightness' about that connection.

Campbell and MacMahon also notes that sometimes there is a big felt shift and at others a series of smaller steps each contributing to a forward movement. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 161). Thus 'the symbol will arise spontaneously and apparently come from nowhere, often by surprise, and usually accompanied by some bodily resolution. The unpredictability makes a difference.' (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 43).

The fine balance of 'letting go' to allow the symbol to arise is also emphasised by Campbell and MacMahon with the more spiritual angle of Bio Spiritual Focusing stating that 'The symbols given to us are gifts (graces) not something we do to ourselves or make happen', (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 199).

The shift is described as 'a distinct physical shift in the bodily sense of a problem or a life situation'. This is because the change comes about in how the person *carries* a problem in her/his body rather than in the *content* that is carried. (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1997, p 89). The carrying of the problem once unblocked allows the shift to occur allowing the person to move forward in her/his life.

Lesley Wilson also commented about the shift as a gift.

'With new people this (the shift) doesn't get emphasised. It's important though and new people need to know about it. It's sometimes gobbledegook that fits. I always talk about it to make sure they have a body sense of it. Pete and Ed emphasise that the felt shift is a *gift* as there is no way we can make it happen. It is a healthy experience of spirit. Because of this it can't be made a step but we need to make sure people recognise it when it happens.'

Having symbolised the felt sense the session may finish or a number of questions may be asked of the felt sense. Campbell and McMahon lists ten questions that can be used. These are:

- How does the worst of this feel in my body?
- What needs to happen (change) inside me for this whole thing to feel better?
- What would feel like a small step forward?
- What would feel like a breath of fresh air?
- How would it feel if the whole thing were all OK?
- What are you trying to do for me? Or How are you trying to help me?
- How do you need me to be with you so you can tell me what you want?
- Would it be OK for a few moments to sit quietly and gently with not wanting to go further?

Lesley Wilson says of asking, 'We don't do much asking. We sit with it allowing it to speak. *Allowing* is a critical thing. We must let it be exactly as it is and sit and allow it to speak. It takes patience to learn to let go of control – it takes trust and not trying to make anything happen.'

After this stage of the process has stopped comes the stage 'finding out if it is OK to stop'. At this stage the Focuser may check inside and find out if this is a place where it would be OK to stop. If at this stage the felt sense agrees that it is OK then the Focuser continues to the next step. If not s/he may go back to the symbolisation stage again and find a new symbol.

### **Inner Relationship Focusing**

Inner Relationship Focusing also calls the next step *symbolisation*. Barbara and Ann note that 'when people started to describe this fuzzy, difficult to describe 'something' that they were sensing, it would shift and change without them doing anything to it. They also noted that 'when people stayed with it for a while it often started to feel lighter, more flowing or like fresh air stirring in a stuffy room.' (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 45).

Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin state that 'the conscious checking in the body for confirmation of whether the symbols fit is at the heart of the process'. They also point out that when we symbolise and resonate, it releases our living forward process. Like other styles of Focusing the need to wait for the symbol to arise is also stressed. Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell suggest that we need to go through the important stage of settling down with 'it' and 'keeping it company'. As with the descriptions of other styles they stress that patience is needed here. A helpful metaphor is also used of walking through a foggy wood with trees and bushes emerging out of the fog.

Inner Relationship Focusing stresses the need to stay in presence and to go very slowly at this stage as well as staying in contact with the unclear edge of the 'something' (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 49). Some other recommendation made are to welcome and to say 'yes' to the new something that has come from the session no matter how insignificant or puzzling it is and to take time to feel any changes in the body no matter how slight, (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 54).

Although the shift is described in this style (McGavin, B., Weiser Cornell, A. 2003, p 103), unlike some other styles, it is not described in much depth and not much detail is given. It is, however, quite explicit that the felt sense knows which way to go and that we feel easier and lighter after a session, (Weiser Cornell, A. McGavin, B., 2003, p 53).

When I asked Barbara McGavin about the fact that the shift is not emphasised she agreed and said that 'One of the biggest problems in teaching in the first course is how to put this over and that we don't have the language to describe it.' In her opinion rather than pointing to the shift what we want to talk about *how the self comes back*. She says that this is the payoff of Focusing. She also said that, 'At the time of writing (the book) our overriding concern was that people didn't get caught up in a pushy controller part (described as a 'controller' in Treasure Maps work).<sup>11</sup>

During the time the symbol is arising or once it has arisen some more suggestions might be made such as:

- You might take some time to sense how that feels in your body
- Maybe sense how it feels from its point of view
- You might sense if it has an emotional quality
- You might let it know you hear it (sense it)
- You might invite it to let you know what it's not wanting

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<sup>11</sup> Treasure Maps is a course run by Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin that aims to deepen the Focusing process and help participants to deal with difficult life issues.

Some difficulties with 'symbols arising' is also described in the book especially the impatience that may arise when waiting for them to arise or that we might not feel as if we are doing anything at this time.

### **Wholebody Focusing**

This stage is called *holding both with equal positive regard*. During this stage the Focuser holds the place that needs attention and also holds the body sense of presence and awareness. This is done in a way that respects each equally. The Focuser then watches the dynamic of holding both. This may be done either by holding a sense of both states at the same time or by going from one place to the other.

For a while, as with the other styles of Focusing the person may feel stuck and very little may appear to be happening - until striking 'gold'. During this time it may be important to ask what the wisdom of the body knows about what is needed. In time a symbol emerges from the place that needs attention and a shift may begin.

Like the symbol described by other styles these may be a word, phrase or picture, but it may also involve 'spontaneous-inner directed physical movements'. These are spontaneous movements that arise from within the person that cause the body to move and shift by itself (Addie van der Kooy calls this 'inner alchemy'). The body often has a sense of inner direction and purpose – so that it can seem as if it has a mind of its own.<sup>12</sup>

Spontaneous inner directed movement is described in Focusing with your Whole Body in the following way:

'Wholebody Focusing also includes spontaneous inner-directed physical movement as a way in which the wisdom of the body may want to express itself through us. There is a deliberate curiosity in any inklings and stirrings in the inner energy field of the body that urge and direct the body to symbolise itself in some kind of physical movement.' (Van der Kooy, A, McEvenue, K, 200, page 5)

### **Summary of stage three**

As described above, this third stage encompasses more than one stage in the Focusing process. The core of this is the symbolising of the felt sense leading to an internal bodily shift of some kind.

These steps are probably the most difficult to describe but are the most profound part of the Focusing process – the time of transformation - and it may be some time before a new Focuser experiences a shift. The difficulty in teaching this stage has been grappled with by many Focusing teachers because of the paradox involved. The paradox is that we need to know that a shift might be experienced but as soon as we know about it we might start expecting it and it will only come by letting go of the expectation.

The balance between description and experience can become a vicious cycle. Focusing teachers have often moved away from describing too much and might not say much about the shift at all. I wonder if some of the people have not learned about the shift end up never experiencing it because they don't know that it is part of the Focusing process. Bio Spiritual Focusing has found a way of dealing with this by having a stage of 'letting go into it'. It then describes the shift as a 'gift'. This takes away the expectation. The fine line between too much information and experience is one that all teachers will no doubt continue to grapple with and I am interested in exploring it more in the future.

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<sup>12</sup> Although spontaneous inner-directed movements often appear at this stage they can appear at any time in the Wholebody Focusing process.

## THE FOURTH STEP/MOVEMENT - RECEIVING, NURTURING OR SENSING FOR A STOPPING PLACE

### What's important about this stage?

At the end of the Focusing process all styles agree that we need to take time to receive and absorb the change that has occurred. Many of the Focusers I spoke to said that this was the most neglected step in the process. Gendlin reiterates this in his book 'Let your Body Interpret your Dreams' (Gendlin, E., 1986 p 105). He humorously says that right after something opens up and shifts and it is wonderful we often say: 'OK I've got it, it's great yes that's the new way I need to be. I need it like life itself. I've had it for three seconds, let's stop.'

All styles of Focusing put emphasis on the need to take time to absorb the process and this is how each describes it:

### Basic Focusing

Basic Focusing (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003, p 60 – 61) calls the final movement (movement 6) 'receiving'. The book stresses that it is important to welcome whatever comes and to take a full minute or do so. It also says that whatever comes won't be overwhelming if we receive it and also stay *with* it but not *in* it. It then suggests that the Focuser can sense whether to do another round of Focusing or if it is time to stop.

At the end of my session with Bebe Simon she took me through a step previously unfamiliar to me and suggested that I find a small step that I can practice in order that I can live from a new-found quality arising from the shift. She directed me to the book 'Let you're your Body interpret your Dreams (Gendlin, E., 1986, p 107). Here Eugene Gendlin has written a sixth 'check' called 'do you practice with small action steps?' where he describes doing this and allowing ourselves to run through something new that we can practice in action.

### Bio Spiritual Focusing

This movement is called the nurturing period by this style. This style suggests some quiet time to be aware of any changes that have arisen in the body and that these are compared to how the body was before having Focused.

Lesley Wilson described it to me in this way:

We spend a lot of time on the last step and it has several steps. We need to make sure we fully receive what's come in. If the session is unfinished we will promise to go back. We also make a before and after check and remember how we felt at the beginning compared to how we feel now, and get a body sense of the difference – often when doing this a new piece will arise. There is always a thanking. Christians will say a little prayer or get a body feel of thankfulness for the whole process. For non-Christians there is a recognition and honouring of our life energy.

### Inner Relationship Focusing

Inner relationship has a lot of parts to this stage, which it calls 'sensing for a stopping place'. Firstly it emphasises the fact that we don't necessarily want to stop abruptly and we need to make sure we have some time to stop. At this point we may also need to acknowledge anything that still needs attention and say that we are willing to come back. The manual (McGavin, B., Weiser Cornell, 2003, p 110) also addresses the fact that we may not have experienced a shift at the end of a session and that this may mean that we still feel uncomfortable. The importance of acknowledging this is stressed and knowing that we may have at least made contact or have made some relationship with a part of ourselves. We then need to receive the experience and fully embody any insights or shifts that have occurred. We can also let it know that we are willing to come back and may mark the place with an image or a symbol so we know how to return to it. Finally, as in Bio Spiritual Focusing, we can thank it for what's come in the session – even if we don't feel comfortable at this stage we can thank it from a state of presence. If we feel good when we end the session we can bring that feeling out into the present.

### **Wholebody Focusing**

When I spoke to Addie van der Kooy he said that he thought this step, which is called, ‘nurturing’ was often neglected. As with the other styles, time is taken to end the session slowly and to notice how the body feels. Addie van der Kooy also suggests finding a handle or symbol for the new body sense that has come. If the session is still unfinished he says that shifts may occur after the session has finished.

### **Summary of step four**

One vital piece of the final stage is to take time to receive what has come from the Focusing session. Each style also has slightly different emphasis. For example, Gendlin suggests that we sense if it is right to go through a new round of Focusing and to also practice small steps in order to live from the new found quality.

Inner Relationship is more intent on making sure that the Focuser can come back if s/he wishes to and has many stages to ensure that the Focuser can come back and not break off a good relationship. It also discusses difficulties that may arise when stopping.

Bio Spiritual Focusing brings out the need for the Focuser to compare how s/he is to before starting the session and for grateful thanks in the form of a prayer or honouring our life energy.

Finally, Wholebody Focusing as well as noticing how the body feels at the end of the session also suggests finding a symbol to capture the felt sense at the end of the session.

## **IS THERE A MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STYLES OF FOCUSING?**

I have had a session in each of these styles of Focusing and very much appreciated each one for what it brought. Because of the varying amounts of time I’ve spent doing the sessions I don’t feel able to compare them directly. I’ve had only a twenty-minute Bio Spiritual Focusing and Wholebody Focusing session, a one-hour session of Basic Focusing (as well as what I learned from the Focusing book) compared to regular Inner Relationship Focusing sessions since 2003. Having said this I intend to follow up what I did and discover more.

My conclusion is that the underlying method of Focusing is basically the same but each style has it’s own slant which defines it. All of the Focusing I experienced retains the sense of ‘a kind of interested, exploratory contact with a felt sense, allowing symbols to emerge and checking the symbols back with the felt sense’ (Ann Weiser Cornell, *The Focusing Connection*, September 2006). At the same time each brings a special ‘something’ to the Focusing process.

In the sections below I say what I think each style of Focusing brings to the process. My apologies for anything I have missed, as I don’t expect this to be the definitive list.

### **What does each style of focusing bring to the process?**

#### **Basic Focusing**

##### ***The basic style of Focusing***

*Everything* about ‘basic’ Focusing is unique because all other styles of Focusing are variations of what Eugene Gendlin’s originally taught. I recently watched a video of Focusing teachers (Lou, N., *Focusing Teachers*). Some teachers such as Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin and Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon have developed their own styles of Focusing from the basic style and are of course the subject of this project. Others who use the basic style have developed their own ways to express the six movements – individual teachers express Focusing in very individual ways.

### ***An evolving process and a respectful Focusing community***

Although Focusing was first ‘discovered’ and named by Eugene Gendlin, he has never sort to limit how it is taught and used, as long as the spirit of the main steps is kept intact.

I have noticed that many people who discover a new system, such as this, strive to hold onto it so that it remains their ‘property’ and invention. In contrast Eugene Gendlin has been happy to watch Focusing develop in many different ways. This has enabled a very open minded Focusing community to arise. Most people within the community are interested in exploring different ways of Focusing and those I interviewed would often refer to each other’s work in a positive and respectful way. Hence there are many overlaps in the ways Focusing has developed and practitioners have ‘borrowed’ from each other in order to create the different styles. In this context Lesley Wilson said:

‘Doing Focusing is really grass roots and people recognise that they are journeying together. One of Ed’s passions is that he has always emphasised mutual vulnerability. Where two or more are gathered together in this they are willing to be mutually vulnerable and let go of controlling the other person...’

### ***The first description of the basic steps***

Eugene Gendlin describes the six movements of Focusing in great detail in his first book (Gendlin, 1978 and 2003 pp 103 - 107). In the Focusing Connection, Vol. XXIII, No 5, Sept 2006, Ann Weiser Cornell says that Eugene Gendlin has said to her that the six steps described in the first book are ‘awful’. He describes variations in later books including slightly different steps in Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams (Gendlin 1987, p 103). It is clear that his understanding of Focusing is evolving and he is encouraging other Focusers to evolve.

I would, however, dispute his own conclusion about the ‘awfulness’ of the six steps in his initial book. Although others have expanded on what Gendlin first wrote, he describes many aspects of Focusing in great depth including the felt sense, the murky stage when finding a handle and the shift and the unexpected or surprise aspect of it – in doing this he whets our appetites to experience and understand the Focusing process better. Many people like myself would not have benefited from Focusing without the clarity of this original book.

### ***Living forward and taking tiny steps***

Eugene Gendlin says that the result of our inner processing always moves us in a forward direction and he calls this ‘living forward’. He describes taking tiny steps forward as ‘small action steps’ and he writes, ‘a real change involves not only acting differently in some situations. It is a change in how you are alive, in the manner of experiencing. In the long run that changes all the situations in ways you cannot plan in advance’.

He encourages the Focuser to practice these small steps and says, ‘when we ‘practice’ something. We know we aren’t doing it well – yet. There is room to fall down. And yet we give ourselves credit: We’re actually practicing!’ and then says ‘Choose some not-so-important situations, and try living from your new bodily quality. Do some at-first tiny action steps’ (Gendlin, 1986, p106).

When I had a Focusing session with Bebe Simon she helped me to find a way to take what I had received from the session into my life by practicing it. This was similar to Gendlin’s suggestion above and I found it a very useful experience.

### ***Exercises to understand the felt sense***

Bebe Simon taught me an exercise called the ‘love exercise’ at the beginning of my Focusing session. The love exercise enables the Focuser to experience the nature of the felt sense in a positive way (the exercise can be found in Gendlin 1978 and 2003, p 87). Bebe Simon said that in all the years that she had assisted Eugene Gendlin he always used this exercise to illustrate the possibility of the positive nature of the felt sense. It doesn’t seem to be used by most teachers now, but it is a very helpful exercise.

### ***An underlying philosophy***

Focusing is a part of a whole underlying philosophy which is described by Eugene Gendlin in a number of writings including 'A Process Model' (Gendlin, E., 1997), 'A Theory of Personality Change' (Gendlin, E., 1964) and 'The Creation of Meaning' (Gendlin, E., 1997). A few lines seems rather an insubstantial amount to write about a whole philosophy but I know very little about it at present so cannot make any more comment other than knowing that it is an important aspect of Gendlin's work.

### **Bio Spiritual Focusing**

#### ***The spiritual aspect***

The Bio Spiritual style of Focusing emphasises the spirituality of the process. The teachers of this style have helped many people – Catholics, Quakers and Buddhists as well as many others who may or may not have formal religious beliefs to become aware a true sense of their own spiritual nature within.<sup>13</sup> This enables them to grow and develop and find an internal peace as opposed to having a limiting set of beliefs. Ed McMahon says, 'if we have violence inside how can we have peace in the world?' (McMahon, 1993 pp 58). Focusing brings us a truth and peace inside instead of fighting on the outside.

#### ***Letting go into***

The second stage of the process in the Bio Spiritual style encourages the Focuser to 'let go' into the process. The other styles of Focusing do not describe this as a step – although they allude to the importance of it. In my own experience I have found that there comes a time in the process that I need to let go (I almost feel I have to 'surrender' to the process – not a fashionable word I know) in order for it to unfold.

In their book Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon describe it by saying, 'The catch, however, is that for Focusing to work, a person must first *let go* of the need to be in charge of the felt sense. As soon as a person finally does let go and experiences resolution in bodily knowing, something deep inside usually wants control over this process so that it can be repeated again and again at will' (Bio Spirituality, 1985, p 134).

#### ***Caring, feeling presence***

Each style of Focusing has a different way of helping the Focuser to stay with the process and to feel that they are in touch with a 'something' inside. Bio Spiritual's 'caring feeling' presence is a very useful in this respect. I have found that when I am Focusing and need an extra sense of presence, bringing in the 'caring' aspect can give me a sense of increased safety so that I am better able to be with what might otherwise be difficult areas.

#### ***Description of process skipping***

'Process skipping' is a term first used by Eugene Gendlin (Gendlin, E., 1964) but it is written about very clearly by Peter Campbell in his co-authored book (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1985, p 177 – 194).<sup>14</sup> He describes what most of us do when we don't wish to deal with difficult feelings – which is to find ways of avoiding them. For example, on a day-to-day level we may do things like 'phone up a friend', 'listen to music', 'go shopping', 'work on the computer' or 'go out drinking'. Of course there's nothing wrong with any of these activities except when they become a way of substituting an un-dealt with, negative feeling with another behaviour. Peter Campbell has described how Focusing enables us to embrace and transform the actual feelings so that we have more choice over our behaviour.

#### ***Grace and gifting***

The 'shift' is a very important aspect of the Focusing process. It is also another one of the many paradoxical areas of Focusing. It can only arise if we don't expect it to come. The more we try to make it happen, however, the more it can elude us. Bio Spiritual Focusing calls the shift a 'gift' and that it comes through 'grace'. Lesley Wilson said that,

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<sup>13</sup> Other styles may also help people to become aware of their spiritual nature but this is the only style that says this overtly.

<sup>14</sup> This was first described by Gendlin in 'A theory of Personality Change.'

‘Pete and Ed emphasise that the felt shift is a gift. There is no way we can make it happen. It is a healthy experience of spirit. Because of this it can’t be made a step - although we need to make sure people recognise it when it happens.’

### ***Focusing as a way of life***

Although the use of Focusing ultimately becomes a way of being to anyone who uses it on a regular basis, Bio Spiritual Focusing probably best describes it as a way of life.

Lesley Wilson described to me how she Focused by going into her beautiful garden sometimes and getting a felt sense of it. Also in the book ‘Bio Spirituality’ Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon state that, ‘Letting go’ and ‘allowing’ unveil a new horizon within bodily knowing. People who live with this dimension everyday gradually come to relish being surprised by what their bodies know about meaning and direction in life... ..as this happens Focusing is valued in a different way. While still prized as a helpful approach to dealing with difficult things, it is cherished even more as a doorway of bio-spiritual awareness.’

### ***Head Brain and Body Brain***

In the Bio Spirituality Focusing book it states that ‘you get out of your minds by getting into the body’ (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1985, p 53)

Lesley Wilson elucidated this by describing the importance of notion of a head brain as well as a body brain and described that a dance goes on between the two when we Focus.

### ***Companioning without using active listening***

Although Bio Spiritual Focusing teaches people to Focus with a companion, Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon state in their book that they do not initially emphasize the listening skills that are most often taught at the beginning. They say that they do this because ‘active listening sessions easily become training sessions for the therapist rather than sessions within which people experience forward movement within the process of Focusing’ (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1985, p 141). Because people need to find ‘some simple way to hold in their bodies and ‘own’ negative feelings’ they ‘plunge people directly into caring feeling presence’ so that they can be with scary places and ‘let go into the truth of themselves’ (Campbell, P., McMahon, E., 1985, p 142) when they Focus. This means that when first learning Focusing the companion might ask the Focuser questions rather than reflective listening in order to find out what s/he is experiencing and where s/he is within the process.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Inner Relationship Focusing***

#### ***Making a relationship with our inner self***

In order for inner growth and emotional healing to occur we must have a relationship within ourselves. Inner Relationship Focusing especially emphasises this inner relationship and encourages the Focuser to make contact with the felt sense, for example by greeting it with a ‘hello’ and where necessary acknowledging it. Inner Relationship Focusing also brings out the importance of the ‘I’ as *presence* with the ‘something’ that is inside and needs to be Focused upon.

***Presence*** Presence has been discussed in depth above, but needs to be emphasised here because it is such an important aspect of this style of focusing. Presence is described in many ways including, ‘Open and spacious. Vast as the universe, trusting and knowing, patient... things grow at their own pace, deep in peace, accepting of all things as they are....’ Weiser Cornell, McGavin, 2002, p 60) Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin describe many ways to stay in and deepen our experience of Focusing by being in presence – especially through language such as ‘I’m *sensing* something...’ or ‘I’m *aware* of something..’ or by acknowledging the ‘something’ or saying ‘hello’ to it. Being in presence enables us to stay separate but remain *with* what we are Focusing upon.

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<sup>15</sup> I did however notice that in my session with Lesley Wilson she did use reflective listening.

### ***Language***

Ann Weiser Cornell has a background in linguistics. Along with Barbara McGavin she has developed many useful ways of using language to deepen our experience of Focusing. Many of these are described in Weiser Cornell and McGavin, 2003. They include using ‘presence language’ by saying ‘you’re/I’m sensing/noticing/aware of ...’ as described above, also using the word *something* in many areas of Focusing. There are also many useful responses that the companion might use, for example, using the word ‘sort of’ if it’s not quite an exact description. Another response for the companion to make to the Focuser may be, ‘if it feels right you might want to...’ to ensure that the Focuser feels under no pressure when the companion makes a suggestion or when something is too long to repeat back to say ‘...and there’s more’.

Two other phrases used only by Inner Relationship Focusers are ‘I’m sensing how IT feels from ITS point of view’ and ‘I’m letting it know I hear it’. These are used to help to convey and embody the empathy from Focuser (in Presence) to the felt sense that is the absolute centre of Inner Relationship Focusing. As Ann Weiser Cornell says, ‘If you hear them, you know it is Inner Relationship Focusing!’

### ***No questions***

All styles of Focusing use some form of reflective listening when companioning a Focuser (although see above for companioning in Bio Spiritual Focusing). Inner Relationship probably takes reflective listening one step further and tries to avoid the use of any questions at all (Weiser Cornell, 2005, pp 173 – 181) Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell say that when companioning is done well and without questions this means that the Focuser can get on with her/his own process and not feel interrupted by the companion. This underlines the fact that it is the Focuser’s process not the companion’s.

### ***Dealing with the critic***

Inner relationship Focusing deals with critical voices in a unique way. We all have voices that interrupt us. They may say things such as, ‘you’re lazy’, ‘you’re weak’, ‘you’ve messed up again’ and many other criticisms. Gendlin (Gendlin, E., 1978 and 2003, p 98) recognises this but says very firmly, ‘do not respect the critic’ and later says ‘I say to it “go away and come back when you have something new to say”.’ He also remarks that the voices come back again and again.

Inner Relationship Focusing has another way of dealing with these voices and this method enables them to stop seeming to ‘harass’ us. Instead of going through the options of ignoring the critic or even agreeing with it Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin suggest acknowledging a critical voice and hearing it from a state of presence. This allows the Focuser to stop identifying or fighting with it. Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin also suggest asking this ‘critic’ to let the Focuser know how it is feeling and then letting it know that whatever it has to say has been heard. The critical voice then no longer controls a person, what it’s scared of has been heard and acknowledged. Now it starts working *with* the Focuser. (Weiser Cornell, A., McGavin, B., 2002, pp 172 – 177) The critic is no longer trying to control us because we have allowed it to let us know why it is really scared *for* us rather than being *against* us.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Focusing outside the middle area of the body***

Eugene Gendlin suggests that the felt sense is experienced in the middle area of the body. Although this may usually be true, it isn’t always the case. Inner relationship Focusing directs the Focuser to start at any place that wants her/his attention. This may be in the head or limbs or even in an area on the outside of the physical body. Allowing the process to start literally anywhere ensures that the Focuser doesn’t force the process but embraces whatever arises.

### ***Treasure Maps and going deeper***

Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin take the focusing process deeper in their Treasure Maps to the Soul course. Dealing with the critic or controller is a part of this and the course is designed to enable a person to deal with her or his most difficult ‘tangles’ and problems.

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<sup>16</sup> This is taught in much more detail in Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin’s Treasure Maps course.

## **Wholebody Focusing**

### ***Wholebody presence***

Wholebody Focusing is unique in that it literally allows the *whole* body to heal the individual parts that need help. As described above, the process begins by the Focuser finding a sense of being ‘grounded’ and then allowing a feeling of ‘whole body presence’ to emerge which can also be symbolised. This presence allows the Focuser to feel fully present to the emerging felt sense and it is equivalent to the sense of ‘presence’ and ‘feeling caring presence’ discussed above. When a felt sense then begins to express itself it can be held by the whole body presence and allowed to heal. This wholebody healing is summarised by a quote from Addie Van Der Kooy and Kevin McEvenue book, ‘Whenever a part of me feels loved it awakens to its own healing’ (Van der Kooy, A, McEvenue, K, 2006, page 1).

### ***Initial standing posture***

Although people may sit if they wish, sessions are often commenced with the Focuser standing. This allows the Focuser to find a sense of the weight of the body being supported by the floor.

### ***Spontaneous inner-directed movements***

These movements may occur at anytime during the Wholebody Focusing process but may especially arise during the time of ‘holding both with equal positive regard’. The movements are ‘an important way of allowing the body wisdom to express itself in and through us’ (Van der Kooy, A, McEvenue, K, 2006, page 3).

Spontaneous movements are different from those a person might instigate by her or himself. The person will not be controlling them, instead they are arising from the Focuser’s bodily wisdom. When doing them it seems as if the body has a will of its own. Throughout the time that these movements occur, however, the Focuser will remain in control and can stop the movements at any time.<sup>17</sup> Kevin McEvenue often demonstrates these movements using an arm raising exercise. In it the arms are invited to rise up in any way they wish to.

### ***Holding both with equal positive regard***

Rather than being present to the felt sense and symbolising it, in this style of Focusing the whole body presence and the felt sense are sometimes *both* held in the Focuser’s awareness at the same time. By doing this the body can reassess how it is holding the Focuser’s issues physically and this can lead to bodily shifts. Sometimes this ‘holding both’ is not necessarily needed. Addie Van de Kooy says,

‘This is a very fluid thing and to have both in your awareness is not always needed. In my experience, this ‘holding both’ is a dynamic that is extremely useful when being with deep places which are strongly protected and which need to actually *feel* a sense of the Focuser’s presence in the rest of her/his body in order to begin to feel safe and open up.

### ***Awareness of the importance of posture***

It has always struck me that most Focusers pay very little attention to their posture when Focusing. As both an acupuncturist and a qigong practitioner I tend to be aware of the importance of posture and its potential affects on a person’s well-being. For example, a person sitting slumped and compressing their stomach, abdomen and/or chest area may have no access to these parts while Focusing. It could of course be argued that they hold the body in this way for a good reason, but if the area remains compressed by habitual bad posture the Focuser may never have access to the area’s messages. Wholebody Focusing is different in that it is more physically based. This ensures that Focusers are aware of their posture at the start of the process thus allowing potential access to all areas within the body and giving an open invitation to the whole body to do what it needs to do.

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<sup>17</sup> There are other forms of bodywork where these spontaneous movements arise, most notably a qigong practice called ‘spontaneous moving qigong’. This qigong practise is designed to clear the body of blockages and obstructions to the qi and in the past I have practiced this style on a regular basis so was fascinated to see this arise in the Focusing process.

## **What have I discovered and how has it informed my practice?**

For me, one of the most important aspects of this project was the process of doing it. I really enjoyed meeting and speaking with Focusing practitioners who use different styles of Focusing. It resulted in me having an expanded awareness of what Focusing is all about as well as experiencing the similarities and difference between the styles. Overall it was very thought provoking and I am aware that my own practice has evolved and deepened considerably as a result.

Below are some of my personal discoveries:

### ***The effect of the different ways of starting a session***

Since starting this project I have thought a lot about how the way a session starts might affect its later development. My interest came from my different experience of Focusing when I first learned with Barbara McGavin. When I first used Focusing from a book I almost always started with a feeling or an issue that was already in my awareness. Later when I used a body scan I found I had different issues arising and that they seemed to form more slowly. Having pondered this for a while, I read an article by Ann Weiser Cornell that clarified what I had been thinking.

In the *Radical Acceptance of Everything*, (Weiser Cornell, A., 2006, p 239 - 242) Ann Weiser Cornell describes different aspects that may be present at the start of a Focusing session and how together these form a full 'felt sense'. These aspects are:

- 1) A body sensation (the most important)
- 2) An emotional quality
- 3) A connection to life or a story
- 4) Imagery or visual symbolism

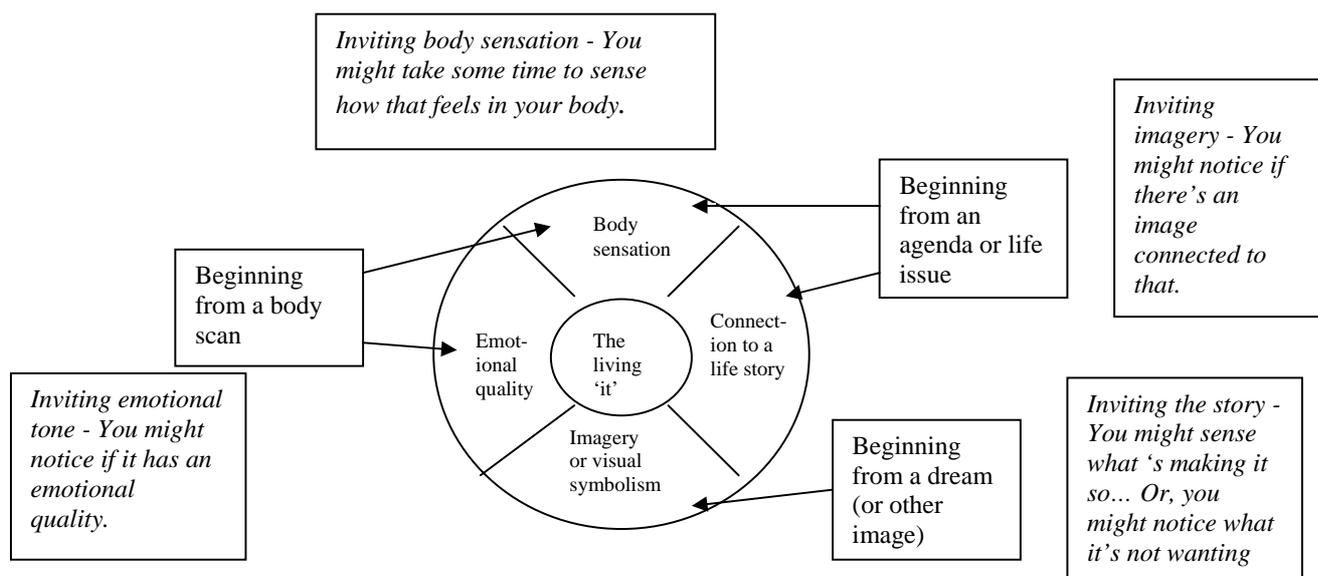
When these various aspects are all present the felt sense may deepen and then 'take on a life of it's own' and the session move forward smoothly. I've copied the diagram from the book (the circle and parts inside it) to illustrate this.<sup>18</sup>

I think that the various ways of starting a session might lead the Focuser to different aspects of the full felt sense and I've added boxes with arrows to illustrate this. In my experience if we start a session with a body scan this is more likely to lead the Focuser to experiencing an emotional quality or a body sensation – and sometimes both. If we start with the whole sense of an issue (agenda item) this will lead us to a connection with a life story as well as taking us to a body sensation (and sometimes an emotion too). I have less experience of a session commencing with an image but certainly if the image comes first it must then be experienced in the body.

Knowing about these aspects may enable the Focuser to allow the 'whole felt sense' to emerge or a companion to make suggestions to help the Focuser contact what's missing of the felt sense. Ann Weiser Cornell gives some suggestions that might be used to invite the missing aspects to form and I've put these in the outer boxes in italics. I've found the article extremely useful. As well as helping me to understand how various ways of starting a session will lead to different aspects of a felt sense, it has also clarified which suggestions may be appropriate and when. Since reading this I feel much more aware of possible suggestions that I might use to encourage the process when companioning.

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<sup>18</sup> With thanks to Ann Weiser Cornell for allowing me to use this.



### ***Thoughts about teaching at the start of a session***

Thinking about the issue of different aspects of a 'Full Felt Sense' leads me to consider one aspect of how Focusing is taught.

All teachers of the different Focusing styles have said that it doesn't matter how a session starts as long as the Focuser starts *somewhere* - and to some extent this is true. It strikes me, however, that a new Focuser needs to experience three aspects of the Focusing process in order to learn it fully. These are:

- How to get into and maintain presence
- The experience of a felt sense
- How to symbolise the felt sense and find resonance between the felt sense and the symbol it (and if possible experience a corresponding shift).

In my experience when I start a session with an issue or agenda item I often fairly directly experience most of the aspects of a full felt sense discussed above. This leads me to start to symbolise it and resonate the symbol. Starting with an issue or agenda won't necessarily teach me what presence is, however.

If I start by scanning the body this often leads to a less fully formed felt sense but a stronger sense of presence. Suggestions such as those given by Ann Weiser Cornell, above, will then enable a fuller felt sense to form. Because all of the stages overlap I've noticed that the symbolisation process seems to grow slowly as the questions are asked and the stages of Focusing seem less discrete.

I noticed that the group I learned with, who started by scanning the body, became very proficient at being in presence. I wondered, however, if they didn't learn to symbolise as well as they might (I spoke about this with Barbara McGavin later). As a result some of them didn't know that they might expect a shift to occur.

My conclusion is that if people learn many ways of starting a session they might get a fuller experience of *all* aspects of Focusing rather than different specific parts of the process (I'd love to have more discussion about this with more experienced Focusers).

### ***Does the style of sensing for a symbol vary from person to person***

Although the symbol is *allowed* to arise from the felt sense, it appears to me that symbolisation is sometimes more actively sensed and at other times more passively experienced. To some degree the difference can be put

down to the type of symbolisation. Finding the right word can sometimes be a more active process. A picture or scenario is more likely to evolve, so is more passive.

I think the nature of the process can also vary according to the style of Focusing used. For example, the Bio Spiritual style of Focusing asks the Focuser to 'let go into' the felt sense and then just wait until the symbol arises – which is less active and more allowing – so that the symbol forms at a more unconscious level.

At the other extreme Eugene Gendlin suggests that the Focuser gets 'warmer' or 'cooler' as s/he more actively senses for the 'handle' – this process takes place more consciously. Inner Relationship and Wholebody Focusing seem to be between these two extremes. (I'm not sure if others think that this is true and am interested in more discussion about it).

Addie Van der Kooy has added here

'In my experience this has a lot to do with the quality of being present with the felt sense. The felt sense is very responsive to a presence that allows it to fully be the way it is, without agendas. This then generates an interchange in which both the 'more active sensing' and the more passive listening to what the felt sense wants to say is naturally included as part of an emerging relationship that begins to form between the Focuser and the felt sense.

Temperament may also play a part in the way the symbol is sensed. Myers Briggs 'Judger' types like to complete things whilst 'Perceivers' like to take in more information. I wonder if Judger types are more likely to be slightly more proactive in sensing for a symbol than a Perceiver who is more receptive and likes to take in information.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The nature of the symbol arising***

People's symbolisation varies enormously. The variation is partly due to the way the Focuser takes in information through the senses. I have discussed this with Barbara McGavin and some of my understanding comes from this discussion as well as from my knowledge of sub-modalities and representational systems from Neuro Linguistic Programming.<sup>20</sup>

The felt sense is experienced in the body and may be further symbolised by a representation that is either visual (a picture that is either static or moving as a scenario) or auditory (a word or phrase or sound) or physical/kinaesthetic (a body sensation or feeling or a gesture or bodily movement). In order for a shift to take place it seems that the symbolisation needs to be fully formed in all of these areas<sup>21</sup>.

The physical aspect is always present when Focusing and this will of course shift and change throughout the Focusing session. Often a further symbol may also appear through another channel, for example, it may be visual. At this stage the visual aspect may not be the final stage of the symbolisation but may 'point' (word used by Barbara McGavin and a number of other Focusing teachers) to the deeper symbol. In this example it might be a word or phrase that completes the symbolisation in all three areas and allows a shift to take place.

### ***The session gets 'messy'***

Rob Foxcroft talked about the session getting 'messy' when I had a mentoring session with him. I'm grateful, as it made explicit something I had experienced implicitly but had not put into words. It feels messy or fuzzy during at least two stages in the Focusing process. Eugene Gendlin describes this in his book (Gendlin E, 1978

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<sup>19</sup> There are many books written about Myers Briggs – one of my favourites is 'Please Understand Me II' by David Keirse, Prometheus Nemesius Book Company, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> We take in information and represent the external world via our five senses especially via our eyes, ears and feelings but also taste and smell. We also process information by seeing pictures, hearing sounds, and having feelings on the inside. The way we sequence what we take in, forms meaning in our lives. For more on this see 'An Insider's Guide to Sub-Modalities' by Richard Bandler and Will MacDonald.

<sup>21</sup> Although I stand by the essence of this, on discussing the project with Barbara McGavin, she pointed out to me (and I agree) that this may be a bit simplistic. For example, 'kinaesthesia' can be divided into both tactile and large body movements, and auditory into both tonal and words. It definitely needs more exploration.

and 2003, page 55) when he describes the felt sense forming. There is also a messy stage in the middle of the session when the felt sense is symbolising itself. 'Letting go into it' as described in Bio Spiritual Focusing also helps the Focuser to sit with this slightly uncomfortable phrase rather than getting frustrated and giving up. I think it's important that this part of the process is emphasised so that the potential difficulties at these stages are pre-empted.

### ***Issue changing vs. life changing***

Long term Focusers seem to develop an increasing ability to stay in presence and 'be' with whatever comes up for them. When I first started Focusing I definitely worked mostly on 'issues' that arose in my life. As I continued Focusing and I found it easier to get into presence I found that the issues became deeper (also working more with a companion helped) and more life changing. Now sessions vary. I sometimes work on what may seem to be a relatively small (but always turns out to be significant) issue and also may have some deep session which is more about my inner 'being'.

I don't think the depth of a Focuser's session necessarily depends on the style of Focusing they have been taught and I think all sessions are likely to deepen as the Focuser gains more experience. How someone Focuses also depends on many other aspects of who the person is.

Basic Focusing, however, may be slightly more likely to encourage the Focuser to deal with issues (and this may also come from starting with an agenda as stated above) and Bio Spiritual Focusing slightly more likely to encourage Focusing as a way of life and it's more spiritual aspects.

### ***Focusing with a companion vs. solo-Focusing***

I stated at the beginning of this project that I was surprised that Barbara McGavin taught me to Focus with a companion - as the book had taught me to Focus alone. I discovered that all styles of Focusing start by teaching people to Focus with a companion (or guide) as this is the easiest way to learn it. I also discovered that some people never Focus alone and have no desire to do so. This was a big surprise to me, although I do appreciate the benefits of Focusing with a companion and have found that the process of Focusing with another person has allowed my solo-Focusing to deepen. At the same time I also appreciate the ability to solo-Focus as it allows me to be self sufficient and able to Focus whenever the need arises and not just when I have a session booked.

### ***Posture when Focusing***

I've mentioned this above. How a person sits (or stands) when s/he Focuses, seems to have an effect on what is Focused on. Some people sit slumped when they Focus so their process may not open up and they may miss out on important messages from those areas because they are squashed. Wholebody Focusing seems to be the only style of Focusing that recognises the importance of posture in relation to the whole process.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Natural Focusers***

Some people seem to be 'natural' Focusers. As yet I haven't completely understood what it is that makes one person a 'natural' and others struggle more with the process.

I have wondered whether those who 'naturally' Focus have either a kinaesthetic/visual or a kinaesthetic/auditory synaesthesia (meaning they do both at the same time and one sparks off the other). Focusers who when feeling a body sensation also see a picture (kinaesthetic/visual synaesthesia) may find it easier to contact a felt sense. This may also enable them to more easily stay with their internal processing.

Myers Briggs 'feeler' types especially 'intuitive feelers' more naturally contact their feelings than 'thinker' types so people in this first category may more naturally take to Focusing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Apparently Eugene Gendlin has also said that lying down is not a good posture for Focusing.

<sup>23</sup> As above see Please Understand Me by David Keirse.

I also suspect that people who have spent more time doing internal work such as meditation, yoga or qigong can appear to be more natural Focusers as they have spent more time dwelling inside their bodies.

### ***How the process is concluded***

The final part of a session will allow it to be assimilated or forgotten, and doing this project reminded me of this again and again. Taking time at the end of a session, writing it down or finding other ways to take the process into ones life (as suggested by Bebe Simon) may make it more real for the Focuser.

### **In conclusion**

At the beginning of this project I stated that my outcomes for this project were to explore:

- The similarities and differences between the different styles of Focusing
- What each style of practise brings to Focusing
- What I might integrate into my own Focusing practise

I have learnt so much by questioning and exploring these areas that in itself this has been enough to make the project very worthwhile. I hope that this project is interesting to those who read it who may in turn gain their own different insights into some of these areas and I would welcome any discussions about any of them.

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