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Translated by Sabine Aydt (09.12.2025)

## “Interaction first”

### The Synergy between Transcultural Learning and Focusing

#### Abstract

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Verbindung zwischen transkulturellem Lernen und Focusing (nach dem austroamerikanischen Philosophen und Psychotherapeuten Eugen Gendlin, 1926–2017). Hintergrund von Focusing ist Gendlins *Experiencing Theory*, die in diesem Artikel in Bezug zum relationalen Paradigma, insbesondere zu Kenneth Gergens Theorie des *Relational Being* gesetzt wird. Ausgehend von der Annahme, dass relationales Denken richtungsweisend beim Umgang mit kultureller Komplexität ist, geht der Text folgenden Fragen nach: *Wie kann ich lernen, mich selbst (mehr) relational und prozesshaft zu denken und zu erleben? Wie kann ich konkret üben, nicht unbewusst in trennende Sichtweisen zu verfallen?* Oder anders formuliert: *Wie lässt sich relationales Denken und Handeln praktisch kultivieren?* Es wird untersucht, inwiefern die Praxis des Focusing einen effektiven Lernweg in diese Richtung darstellt. Schrittweise wird herausgearbeitet, wie in einem Focusing-Setting relationales Dasein erlebt, reflektiert und konzeptuell begriffen werden kann. Daran anschließend wird beschrieben, was sich daraus für transkulturelles Lernen gewinnen lässt. Abschließend werden konkrete Umsetzungsmöglichkeiten vorgestellt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Relationalität, Transkulturalität, Kultur, transkulturelles Lernen, Synergie, Focusing, Experiencing, Lernen durch Erfahrung

This article explores the connection between transcultural learning and Focusing (after the Austro-American philosopher and psychotherapist Eugen Gendlin, 1926–2017). The background of Focusing is Gendlin’s *Experiencing Theory*, which in this article is related to the relational paradigm, in particular to Kenneth Gergen’s theory of *Relational Being*. Based on the assumption that relational thinking points the way forward in dealing with cultural complexity, the text explores the following questions: *How can I learn to think and experience myself (more) relationally and processually? How can I practice not unconsciously falling into divisive perspectives? Or to put it another way: How can relational thinking and acting be cultivated in practice?* In this article, the extent to which the practice of Focusing represents an effective learning path in this direction is being investigated. Step by step, we will work out how relational existence can be experienced, reflected upon and conceptualized in a Focusing setting. This is followed by a description of what can be gained from this for transcultural learning. Finally, concrete possibilities for implementation are presented.

**Keywords:** Relationality, Transculturality, Culture, Transcultural Learning, Synergy, Focusing, Experiencing, Learning through Experience

## 1 Introduction

The term *cultura* was originally always used in Latin in relation to another term, for example *cultura animi*. Culture of the mind and agriculture refer to a human connection to the spiritual realm or to nature (cf. Aydt 2015, 190, Bolten 2014). It referred to the quality of care in mutual exchange: nurturing or cultivating something. In the eighteenth century, the German philosopher Herder initiated a radical change in the concept of culture by speaking of cultures in the plural. This led to the distinction between cultures and the idea of an inside and outside finding its way into thinking about culture (cf. Eagleton 2009, 22).

The discipline of anthropology has long been concerned with researching the unique characteristics of these cultures. Since its early days, the younger field of intercultural and transcultural research has focused on communication between cultures and between cultural actors (cf. Moosmüller 2007, Bennett 2023). Over time, this communicative and interactional perspective has also changed our understanding of culture(s). The static and essentialist view of culture(s) has increasingly been replaced by a description of cultural complexity (cf. Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos 2024, 2). However, the idea of the separation between inside and outside, or the self and the world, remains paradigmatically anchored. Understanding oneself as an "I-in-the-world" can be a lifelong challenge (cf. Aydt 2015, 211ff).

The relational view of cultural complexity (cf. Baumann, Montecinos, et al., 2023) seeks to transform the way this issue is approached. Existence in relation, or relationship and interdependence, is understood as a primary state of being in the world. The perception of separation is a learned or evolutionarily developed perspective that enables humans to detach mentally from this undivided state and develop a sense of self. According to developmental psychologist D. W. Winnicott, humans have the lifelong task of "keeping inner and outer reality separate and yet in mutual connection" (Winnicott 2010, 11). This process is never complete, serving as a source of cultural creativity (cf. *ibid.*, 126f). Experiencing otherness or alienation can be understood as a temporary "break" or pause in this relational process. This is accompanied by experiences of withdrawal and separation, which, in the worst case, can become permanent.

In his seminal work, *Relational Being* (2009), Kenneth Gergen attempts to deconstruct the paradigm of separateness established in European science since the Enlightenment and replace it with a relational approach. This approach is also known as social constructionism (Gergen & Gergen, 2009). The basic idea is that "everything we consider real is socially constructed" People therefore always think and speak from a social context. Unlike constructivism, which considers "the individual mind to be the origin of reality creation," social constructionism considers relationships to be "places of reality construction" (*ibid.*, 8). Consequently, Gergen and Gergen question the reality of a "world of psychological processes taken for granted" such as thoughts, emotions, desires, and memory (*ibid.*, 39). "If the 'inner world' is the most essential characteristic that distinguishes human beings, then we create a world of separation, isolation, and conflict." In fact, through our construction of the self, we have contributed to the creation of an individualist ideology" (*ibid.*, 39). In *Relational Being*, Gergen attempts to reconstruct phenomena such as the psyche and the mind, which are typically considered individual, in a relational manner (cf. Gergen 2009, 40ff). Thus, meaning creation is not viewed as an individual achievement, but rather as "coordinated action" within relationships (*ibid.*,

33ff). Gergen is concerned with thinking radically from a social perspective and deriving forms of action from it. His theory thus offers an interesting point of departure for the transcultural field.

Gergen refers to various traditions that also seek ways out of the divisive paradigm. He mentions systems theory, actor-network theory (Latour), process philosophy (Whitehead), Buddhist teachings, and Ubuntu, among others (cf. *ibid.*, 376–391). Norbert Elias, a sociologist who speaks of "homo non clausus" (Bartels 1995, 23ff), can also be added to this list. His unit of reference is "people in figurations" (Bartels 1995). Current literature should also reference Hartmut Rosa, who proposes understanding coexistence as a "modality of world relation" based on the concept of "resonance" (Rosa 2024, 64). Less well-known are Eugene Gendlin's Experiencing Theory (Gendlin, 1997) and his central approach of "interaction first" (Gendlin, 2015, p. 94), which I will discuss in this article.

The relational perspective on cultural complexity provides new insights (see Baumann, Montecinos, et al., 2023). However, when separateness is deconstructed, social forms, such as individuals or cultures, are no longer available as analytical "units" in our thinking. Nevertheless, I believe it is necessary to find a "place" from which and about which we can think and speak. Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos likely refer to "relational events" (Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos, 2024, p. 5) as a reference point for this reason. Gergen proposes "relationship" as the unit of analysis. While there are still actors, they should be understood as relational and as "multi-being [...] socially embedded, fully engaged in the flow of relationship" (Gergen, 2009, p. 137).

Achieving and maintaining this "multi-being" perspective is not automatic. It must be learned and practiced by those involved. This raises the following pragmatic questions:

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How can I learn to think and experience myself more relationally and processually?  
How can I specifically practice avoiding divisive ways of thinking?  
In other words: How can I cultivate relational thinking and acting?

In the following, I will present Focusing, as developed by Eugene Gendlin, as a relational and transformative practice. I follow Kolb's (1984) definition of "learning through experience," which describes learning as a transformative process consisting of practical experience, reflection, theoretical conception, and experimentation. I will explore the extent to which Focusing can be used to experience, reflect on, understand conceptually, and shape relational being. I will briefly refer to current brain research. Then, I will examine what can be learned from this for transcultural practice. I will do so against the background of my many years of work as a trainer and interdisciplinary researcher in the field of intercultural and transcultural education, as well as a Focusing trainer and practitioner.

## 2 Focusing as a Relational Practice - Five Possible Learning Steps

### 2.1. Experiencing a Relational Space

In the 1960s, Eugene Gendlin and Carl Rogers, founder of person-centered psychotherapy, conducted research into indicators of success in psychotherapy. They discovered that certain clients paused during sessions to reflect on their descriptions and analyses, feel what they had said "in their bodies," and search for the right words to describe their current experiencing. These clients were significantly more likely to experience change than those who did not do this. Shifting between speaking and pre-verbal bodily experiencing proved to be the basis for transformation. Thus, two relationships were relevant: the relationship between the therapist and the client and the relationship between the client and their own experiencing. Gendlin concluded that clients unfamiliar with relating to their own experiencing could simply be shown how to do so. He developed *Focusing* as a method to facilitate this sensing and back-and-forth movement (cf. Gendlin, 1998). It is "a psychological method that is philosophically grounded, scientifically verified, and clinically tested" (Wiltschko & Tom-Wiltschko, 2022, p. 5). It is also used worldwide in non-psychological fields, such as art, education, science, and conflict resolution, where innovative or creative processes are involved.

In my *Focusing* seminars, I often invite participants to pause during an exercise (see Hernandez and Grafanaki, 2018). In the first round, I ask questions that they can easily answer based on their knowledge. For example, I might ask, "Where do you live?" In the second round, I ask the same question again, but this time I give them about two minutes to reflect inwardly and allow an answer to emerge. In the third round, I repeat the question and allow participants to take as much time as they need to come up with a meaningful answer. Usually, the answer changes, and participants describe the experience as follows: "The meaning became deeper and deeper." "The question took on a whole new dimension." "I have arrived at a place I would never have reached in my thoughts." Pausing and reflecting creates a space of awareness in which unexpected connections and meanings become accessible. Then, I invite the participants to describe what "where I live" means to them. The aim is to return to the level of language. Often, very personal images, bodily perceptions, poetic expressions, and illuminating insights emerge.

In *Focusing*, feeling "inward" is not an isolated, private experience, but rather a connection to a realm of implicit knowledge. According to Gendlin (in Wiltschko, 2008, p. 60), "what one finds there *is about the world*." The relationship to the inner self is not separate from the relationship to the outside world. When a person articulates, or "explicates," their implicit experiencing and shares it with others, they can recognize it precisely because it comes from a space of meaning that transcends the purely personal. Thus, we can experience the "inside" as an open space of relationships and meanings.

### 2.2 Consciously Perceiving the Relational Space

Gendlin (1997, xiii) points out that it is possible at any time to refer directly and consciously to the implicit experiencing ("direct referencing"). The pause described above is the first step in this process. Another *Focusing* exercise involves consciously exploring the implicit with curiosity. Participants select a familiar everyday object, hold it in their

hand, and make haptic contact with it. This touching is the gateway to sensing the totality of all processes involved in the situation of "I am holding this object right now." The instructions are:

"As you feel the object, ask yourself: What is my mood right now? What is the quality of my experiencing?" It may be helpful to close your eyes. You may notice something vague. Some people may remember Polaroid instant cameras where you could watch shadowy shapes slowly emerge from a gray area and eventually develop into a clearly contoured image. Observe whether feelings, images, words, thoughts, or other things develop from an indistinct perception. Afterward, make a few notes or tell someone about your experiencing."

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Gendlin claims that when I consciously relate to my experiencing of this entire situation, I have access to the tangible, preverbal, complex richness of all life processes unfolding simultaneously. Gendlin calls this "implicit intricacy," a "preseparated multiplicity" (Gendlin 1991, 92). I can rest my attention on the holistic experiencing, on the edge between the unconscious and the conscious. In this way, previously nameless strands can differentiate themselves. For instance, I hold a small white metal drinking bottle that I carry in my handbag. Then, an initially vague feeling about the bottle's origin, the person who gave it to me, a memory of heat, and my concerns about global warming might arise.

As I just described, my immediate connection to preseparated multiplicity allows me to make various references explicit. However, I will never be able to fully describe what is implicit, just as no map can fully depict the landscape it represents. Maps shape our perception of landscapes, but landscapes always consist of more than can be represented. I am learning to shift between experiencing and expressing, between the implicit and the explicit, and to consciously explore the relationship between the two.

### 2.3 Shaping Relationships by Incorporating the Implicit

The ability of direct referencing as practiced in *Focusing*, is now relevant when understanding an unfamiliar statement. The implicit accompanies all of our everyday situations, usually without our awareness. The tacitly "felt meaning" (Gendlin, 1997, pp. 90–137) of words, gestures, and actions in situations carries the relationship process. It acts like a silent background melody to which a cooperative dance is possible. We often only notice this when irritation arises. As soon as another person behaves in an unfamiliar way, the shared process is interrupted.

For example, consider an anecdote I heard from a German colleague who had moved to Austria. She told me about her first few weeks there. Shortly before 5 p.m., she took a seat on the terrace of a restaurant, and the waiter informed her that the restaurant closed at 5 p.m. When she looked surprised and disappointed, the waiter asked, "What would you have liked?" Linguistically, the question makes no sense. Why should she inform the waiter about something that was no longer relevant after his previous statement? The question could have been interpreted as a provocation. In the following moment of confusion, she vaguely sensed that there was something significant she couldn't grasp yet, which prevented her from responding offensively or confrontingly. In the midst of her hesitation, the waiter repeated the question somewhat impatiently. "What would you

have liked?" Following her vague intuition, my colleague replied, "Just a coffee." The waiter left her with the words, "Well, let's see what we can do," and headed for the kitchen. After a brief moment, he returned with her coffee. She enjoyed it quickly but pleasantly while the waiter cleared the tables around them.

Thanks to my colleague's pause, the "relational performance" (Gergen, 2009, p. 73) of the two was able to develop further. Had she remained at the level of purely linguistic-concrete perception, the "relational event" would have likely unfolded differently. The impression of separation would have arisen. However, by slowing down her reaction, she gave the ambiguity of the situation a chance. Although uncertain, she remained open to different meanings, approaching them with curiosity. In this situation, "direct referencing" was a way of incorporating "felt meaning" and helping shape the relationship.

## 2.4 A Relational Space to Unfold Something New

If no understanding is reached, however, the guest is likely to feel angry or helpless. If she tells others about it, she will probably receive comments and advice. However, she could also choose a *Focusing* setting, in which she explores her experiencing of the situation with the help of a listener. This allows her to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning. This can be helpful when pure reflection does not lead anywhere.

Imagine a *Focusing* session like this: You make an appointment with a *Focusing* partner, and you divide the available time equally. One person speaks (the *Focuser*) while the other listens (the *listener*). Then, we switch roles. As the *Focuser*, I briefly describe my topic or problem (e.g., the annoying experience with the waiter), pause to reflect on the situation's significance, and then ask myself: "How does this situation feel? How do I really feel about this situation?" Before answering, I direct my attention curiously to my body's center. After a little while, I may notice something vaguely significant—a "felt sense." During "felt sensing" (Schoeller, 2021, p. 213), I wait for what wants to unfold, become explicit, or symbolize itself in the moment. Using exploratory language, I describe to the listener what is showing up in me (e.g., "There is something inside me that is contracting"). The *listener* is in the same mode of perception and listens while I find explicit symbols for my experiencing. She reduces the verbal and mimetic interaction options to saying back what she has heard (comparable to mirroring in dialogue; see Steixner in this special edition). The point here is not whether the listener has understood the meaning "correctly,"

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but rather, it is about being a witness to the existence of this experiencing. Under no circumstances is it the *listener's* task to interpret, evaluate, change, or give advice on how to deal with the experience. As a *Focuser*, I follow a process of experiencing that unfolds meaningfully, oscillating between the implicit and the explicit, as described above. This process usually ends when I perceive coherence between the implicit and explicit (e.g., "Ah, the waiter's statement felt like an unpleasant blow to the back of the head that pushes me forward"). This often inspires fresh, metaphorical, or humorous language that makes sense to those involved based on their shared experiencing, offering a new perspective on the topic.

*Focusers* and *listeners* share the experience of recognizing that something meaningful is being expressed and brought into the world. Gergen describes it as follows: "At the moment of my speaking, you become the midwife of my meaning" (Gergen, 2009, p. 167). Gendlin refers to the process of making implicit knowledge coherent through symbols as a "carrying forward" of the experiencing process (cf. Gendlin, 2004). Sensing into the lived experience and finding words expands it, changes the perspective on the situation, and enables different ways of perceiving things in the future. A new, unique language is often needed to deal with ambiguous, ambivalent things in the next step. This small change is experienced and thus differs from changes that occur through pure reflection or analysis.

Felt sensing and explicating are not private matters. "When explication comes, it shows that a felt sense is all about the world" (Gendlin, 1995, p. 547). The *felt sense* is nourished by implicit relational existence, the relationship between oneself and one's environment, the existence as a "multi-being." Everything implicitly related to the *Focuser's* topic flows into the process. This includes the past, as well as the current situation of the *Focuser* and *listener*. In a *Focusing* setting, one can experience being kindly accompanied without interpretation or evaluation. During this process, the *Focuser* and *listener* experience the previously described relational space. This welcoming attitude strengthens the belief that something initially unclear and ambiguous can evolve into something meaningful and new. Thus, the *Focusing* and listening setting enables the concrete experience of "creation of meaning" (cf. Ayt, 2023) as a relational process and shows how this process can be actively shaped.

## 2.5 Gaining Confidence in Processes

Once this approach to one's own experiencing has been learned and such a setting has been established, a longer-term process can develop between the *Focusing* partners. Through repeated practice of *felt sensing* and *listening*, partners develop a stable foundation to support them when conflicts or differences of opinion arise that threaten their relationship. This framework enables the *Focusing* attitude to be activated repeatedly and integrated into everyday life.

Another example: As we know, the response to the coronavirus pandemic has led to significant disagreements within society, often referred to as "division." During this time, I had regular *Focusing* sessions with a partner. Rather than discussing measures or behaviors, each of us immersed ourselves in our *felt sense* of the current situation while the other listened. The totality of life in a society with the virus included our personal health, the history of our partnership, political statements, medical information, professional and social situations, media images, childhood experiences, worries and fears. In each *felt-sensing* process, the *focuser* could immerse herself in this complex "pre-separated multiplicity" and allow new, currently significant aspects, feelings, and perspectives to emerge, which the listener would then witness. My life in a society with Corona differed from that of my partner. At the same time, through our shared practice, we found a way to cope. For instance, I experienced feelings of helplessness and isolation, which were depressing. My partner also felt helpless, but she was reminded of situations in which she had fought for something important. The "fresh" symbolizations of the other person provided points of connection for feelings of connectedness, even though our experiences and behaviors were sometimes different. There was no definitive right or wrong because, in each *felt sensing* process, different meanings could become relevant.

We also gained insights that could be generalized and applied to our everyday lives beyond our meetings.

In a *Focusing* exchange over a longer period of time, participants repeatedly have process-oriented experiences. Thus, being a "multi-being, socially embedded, fully engaged in the flow of relationship" (Gergen, 2009, p. 137) is not an abstract concept, but rather an applied form of "experiential learning." Experience shows: "Thoughts, feelings, desires, and other experiences are not just given things. They are generated by processes" (Gendlin 1986, 266). Gradually, the divisive power of the contents diminishes when the jointly experienced process has a supportive effect.

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### 3 Additional Conceptual Foundations

Gergen discusses the "impossibility of grasping the nature of relational process" (Gergen, 2009, p. 391). This has to do with divisive language that repeatedly draws boundaries. Gergen refers to Wittgenstein's famous dictum, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." (Gergen 209, 373) I have attempted to demonstrate the potential benefits of *Focusing* practice: by approaching relational existence from an experiential perspective, practitioners can also transform and renew their thinking and language.

Gendlin says: „*All human situations are patterned with language, but language is not alone their order. On the contrary, language is never alone, it is implied by the body in situations. When new and odd situations leave us at a loss for words, we can feel that the usual words will not do. Old and new language (and other actions) are implied by the body. It senses new actions and phrasings which do not yet exist, but can come in the steps I described.*" (Gendlin 1986, 270)

When Gendlin speaks of the "body in situations," he is referring to physical experience and sensation, which, for him, is always relational. According to him, there is no separation between humans and their environment. Like Gergen (2009, p. 97), Gendlin emphasizes that the skin does not represent an absolute boundary between the inside and outside. Gendlin illustrates this concept using the example of breathing.

*"The body and the environment are one event, a process. For example, 'air flowing into the lungs and blood cells.' This event can be viewed as either air flowing in or lungs and body cells into which air flows. It is always a single event, seen once from the body and once from the environment"* (Gendlin 2015, 49).

These phenomena have one thing in common: they do not represent the autonomous actions of a subject. Rather, they are processes involving subjects and the environment. This means they are not purely active or passive, nor are they purely subject or object. In Greek grammar, there is a separate form for this: the medium (cf. Aydt 2015, 142). Rather than describing a situation as "A boy (subject) runs (predicate) on the street (environment)," the relational and medial perspective describes the interaction: "There is a running" (Gendlin 2015, 94). In this interaction, both the boy and the environment are involved (medial).

In terms of interaction between individuals, "A and B enter into a relationship with each other" becomes "there is a relating." In this relating, A, B, and the environment interact. They are not separate from each other or the environment, but rather, they are all involved in the interaction and are part of a life process that produces its own forms (cf. Gendlin 2015, 51 ff.). Therefore, it is unnecessary to establish relationships or interactions between separate subjects; interaction occurs first ("Interaction first", Gendlin 2015, 94).

*„Das Zusammen-Geschehen von dir und mir macht uns beide unmittelbar anders, als wir sonst sind. Genauso wie mein Fuß im Wasser nicht den gleichen Fußabdruck wie im Gehen ausüben kann, geschehen wir unterschiedlich, wenn wir einander Umwelt sind. Wie du bist, wenn du auf mich wirkst, ist schon durch mich beeinflusst, aber nicht, wie ich gewöhnlich bin, sondern durch mich, wie ich geschehe mit dir.“* (Gendlin 2015, 95)

*“The interaction between you and me makes us both immediately different from how we usually are. Just as my foot cannot leave the same footprint in water as it does when walking, we behave differently when we are each other's environment. How you are when you interact with me is already influenced by me, but not in the way I usually am, but rather in the way I interact with you.”*

#### 4 References to Current Brain Research

At this point, it is also illuminating to briefly review the theory of Ian McGilchrist, a brain researcher and literary scholar (McGilchrist, 2009). After conducting extensive meta-studies on the two hemispheres of the human brain, McGilchrist concluded that humans have two complementary modes of perceiving the world. These modes correspond to the perceptual abilities ("ways of attending") of the two hemispheres of the brain. One relevant feature of this distinction is the left hemisphere's "responsibility" for separate perception and the right hemisphere's "responsibility" for holistic perception. This distinction can also be observed in animals and is essential for survival. For instance, a bird must simultaneously possess two abilities (cf. McGilchrist 2019, 13f):

1. a holistic, vague perception of its surroundings to detect potential dangers, such as a cat approaching from the background,
2. a precise and selective ability to distinguish a grain of food from a stone.

This "division of labor" and the corresponding coordination between the two hemispheres is particularly well-developed in humans. This is responsible, among other things, for humans' ability to develop language skills. This ability requires sensing broad fields of meaning and distinguishing the meaning of one word from another. In this context, humans can perceive things both in a holistic, "relating" mode and in a separating, identifying mode. They can experience things holistically and processually in the right hemisphere and form structures in the left hemisphere, i.e., recognize and distinguish similarities. These are both ways "in which we relate to the world" (ibid., 13). McGilchrist notes that separating perception has dominated, especially in Western societies since the Enlightenment, and holistic perception has been devalued and even suppressed (cf. ibid., 27–30).

This makes it possible to understand, in a greatly simplified way, that experiencing and feeling the body activates the right hemisphere of the brain and the mode of holistic, undivided perception (see Afford 2020).

As we know, both modes of perception—separate and holistic—are used in *Focusing* practice, and the practice promotes their ability to cooperate. Studies in Japan have investigated the abilities of individuals highly skilled in *Focusing*. The "Focusing Manner Scale" (Fukumori & Morikawa, 2004) was used to measure the *Focusing* attitudes of these individuals. These studies have shown that *Focusing* practice enhances the ability to focus attention on one's own bodily experiencing and to trust one's experiencing while maintaining a healthy, observant distance from it (Aoki & Ikemi, 2014, p. 40). In their meta-study, Aoki and Ikemi investigated the relationship between these *Focusing* attitudes and general well-being. They demonstrated that *Focusing* attitudes positively correlate with health factors such as stress reduction, trust, emotional intelligence, and resilience (cf. *ibid.*, 35ff).

## 9 Relevance in a Transcultural Context

### **9.1. Which skills learned through Focusing are relevant and helpful when learning for transcultural practice?**

The ability to cope with stress is an essential foundation for navigating cultural uncertainty. Experiencing oneself as uncertain but creative at the same time strengthens confidence in one's self-efficacy. Relating to one's bodily experience provides access to the "embodied feeling" of culture (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004, p. 250). Contact with the richness of the implicit world of experiencing and its symbolic-cultural expression develops sensitivity to complexity, ambiguity, processuality, and ambivalence. Experiencing "carrying forward" allows for changes in perspective and behavior that cannot be achieved purely cognitively. Witnessing this process in another person promotes respect and compassion when dealing with others' experiences. In a collaborative *Focusing* setting, participants strengthen their ability to suspend judgments and interpretations while listening attentively. This fosters a sense of openness, curiosity, and trust, helping them to perceive and shape otherness in a relational, rather than divisive, manner.

### **9.2. Can groups and organizations use Focusing in cultural transformation processes?**

With some experience in *Focusing*, the practice can be extended to group settings in a creative way. For example, Otto Scharmer has developed an application of *felt sensing* in management in his Theory U (Scharmer, 2007). He guides groups through a process of changing modes of perception to facilitate change. The process begins with "downloading" known knowledge. Next is a phase of "presencing," comparable to *felt sensing*, from which something new emerges ("emergence"), similar to Gendlin's "explicating, unfolding." Thus, a space for creative development is created.

In my opinion, the elements of the partnership-based *Focusing* practice can be translated into the relational approach to transcultural management developed by Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos (2024). In *Focusing*, learning takes place through experience

("experiential learning," *ibid.*, 11). This creates "relational spaces" (*ibid.*, 14) where "shared experiences" (*ibid.*, 10) occur, leading to "commonalities" (*ibid.*, 11) that do not represent homogenization. Each *felt-sensing* process contributes to "sensemaking" (*ibid.*, 10) in relation to the current situation ("relational event," *ibid.*, 5) in which participants find themselves. However, sensemaking is never complete and always refers to a "beyond" (*ibid.*, 14). Through the experience of "carrying forward," participants change and transform each other ("actors mutually transform each other," *ibid.*, 15).

## 10 Finding Entry Points into *Felt sensing*

Practicing the above-described method of *Focusing* requires time and attention. It is best done in appropriate training courses with others. However, it does not necessarily have to be practiced in this way. I would therefore like to point out a few other easy ways to use and integrate body awareness and experiencing.

When telling or listening to stories, people always incorporate their experiencing of the situation. This can be applied in everyday life or in deliberately designed storytelling cafés, for example. Biographical storytelling never consists solely of facts; it always addresses the holistic mode of perception of the right hemisphere (cf. Aydt and Novy, 2023). Those who are aware of the implicit as a resource can adopt the basic attitude of "welcoming the unclear and slowing down the process" (Jäger & König, 2020, p. 96) during a conversation or while reading a text. Rather than focusing on the unambiguous, one can consciously cultivate a friendly and patient attitude toward unclear or contradictory thoughts and descriptions, interpreting them as indications of "more" implicit knowledge. Slowing down a conversation and asking curious questions, including those about physical perceptions, can open up new perspectives, especially in a transcultural context. Furthermore, one can pay attention to "metaphors and the naming of 'something'" (*ibid.*, 97).

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Expressions such as "something about it is difficult" or "it's somehow restrictive" refer to an implicit feeling that is searching for expression. Speakers often use metaphors to express something that is not yet fully expressible. Accompanying gestures often indicate an implicit excess of meaning as well. In these cases, an attentive conversation partner can encourage curiosity to explore further, thereby cultivating the *Focusing* principle of sensing between the words as the basis of experiencing. Overall, this fosters a culture of communication in which participants can create new meanings together from the implicit whole, transcending existing orders of symbolization.

## 11 Conclusion

Through the practice of *Focusing*, one can learn to locate oneself within a relational, process-based existence. Feeling-based thinking in the spaces between and the conscious use of language familiarize us with the relational process of experiencing. This provides a

basis for reducing the need to rely solely on divisive concepts. In *felt sensing*, the transition between separating and relational modes is repeatedly experienced. This transforms the dichotomy of "separating or relational" into a processual "both-and." Experiencing-related concepts developed by Eugene Gendlin, such as "direct referencing," "felt sense," "interaction first," "carrying forward," and others, provide conceptual guidance. These concepts encourage people to explore their own being-in-the-world as a relational existence and express it in a "fresh" language. Through the practice of *Focusing* partnership, people who learn and act transculturally gain a learning framework in which they can experience, reflect on, and further develop their shared experiences. Focusing attitudes can also be incorporated into everyday situations, contributing to the cultivation of relationality.

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## **Sabine Aydt**

Mag. iur. Dr. phil. Sabine Aydt, independent researcher and trainer on the topics of alienation and transcultural learning; research assistant in the Department of Intercultural Studies at the University for Continuing Education Krems (2002–2011); co-founder of the Austrian network for intercultural education NIC – Networking Inter Cultures (2008); consultant for political education in Benin, West Africa (1993–1997); certified *Focusing* facilitator (since 2015) and trainer (since 2019) (DAF Academy for Focusing); Methodologically and didactically inspired

by biographical storytelling, *Thinking at the Edge* (E. Gendlin), Playback theater, and creative writing. [www.sabine-aydt.net](http://www.sabine-aydt.net).

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