

FOCUSING AND TEENAGERS: A RESEARCH BASED ON SEQUENCED GRAPHIC EXPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

This article wants to demonstrate the efficiency of focusing with adolescents by processing the felt-sense through a sequenced drawing. Thirty-nine students from two baccalaureate forms from a Secondary Institute in the province of Barcelona (Spain) took part in this research ($n = 39$). After an adequate preparation and selecting the theme to focus on, they were asked to draw their felt-sense as accurately as possible (minute 0) and 3 minutes later (a total of five times), using written words if necessary. On behalf of various experts in focusing, a qualitative analysis of the drawings and narratives was carried out with specific templates. The results prove that a 95% of the adolescents managed to form their felt-sense during the focusing and 48% experienced changes in it. The conclusion is that the teenagers have the ability to focus and that sequenced drawing can be of great use to favour the evolution of the Focusing process.

INTRODUCTION

There aren't many scientific studies on the use of Focusing in adolescents and neither on Focusing and drawing and painting. Specifically the existence of any sort of intervention with sequenced drawing and Focusing, is unknown.

Nevertheless, there are various articles that talk about body focus experiences with young children and adolescents and also of how drawing and painting are adequate tools to help focus at this age. The majority of these experiences take place in an educational context even though some do in social interventions or in a psychotherapeutic context.

As far as using focusing in childhood and adolescence, Boukidis (1985) was one of the first to do it. His intervention was from a psychotherapeutic approach in the parent-child relationship. Broertjes (1996), did the same from a therapeutic approach based on games.

Later there are other studies on *Focusing* and childhood (Karno, 2012); Bruinix, 1993; Iberg, 1997; Klein, 1998; Marder, 1997; Nelson (1997), some of which take place specifically at school (Conway, 1997; Stapert, 1997) and others during adolescence (Mepkyp, 1997; Neagu, 1988). Likewise, there are papers on its use in teacher-pupil relationship (Cornelius-White, 2007). Another relevant research is that of Ellison-Cole (2003), who tried to show how *Focusing* could help adolescents in their *self-identity* and *self-assertion*. Also worth mentioning is the presence of Focusing in the TREVA Program (Experiential Relaxation Techniques in the classroom) for adolescents (López-González, 2010) applied in more than 50 schools in Spain.

As far as using artistic expression in Focusing, Mepkyp (1997) used hand painting as an artistic resource to enable the expression of the *felt sense*. The author concluded that artistic expression helps working with the conscious psychological material as well as with the person's unconscious mind. In the same way, she observed how expressing the felt sense, with hand painting, is agreeable and entertaining for adolescents. It also ensures their privacy, and that generates security and is relaxing, allowing them to participate confidently in the experience.

Among the studies in which drawing is applied G. Neagu's one stands out (1988). Drawing was used as a mirror to verify and adjust the handle, that is, verify if the drawing expressed what the child was feeling at the time. The author emphasized on the importance of the relationship that took place between the adult and child or adolescent. For this author the most important aspect was that the minors managed to connect with their inner felt sense by the means of drawing, as in other cases, with words or movement. The fact of expressing the felt sense with drawing helps children and adolescents take a distance from 'that' they are focusing, and on a long term leads to a higher level of self control to handle their inner experience.

In the same way, L. Rappaport (1988) analysed the possibilities drawing offers *Focusing*, in a brief article. In addition to drawing as a means of adjusting the handle, this author suggests oral dialogue, with the means of questions to delve into the felt sense.

Finally, M. Leijssen (1992) features drawing in his article as a means of nonverbal communication, which eases an internal dialogue for the participants. In this case, sequenced drawing is used to express the felt sense and also to delve in it. Through an internal dialogue the participants are invited to draw the sensation during a time, being able to observe the changes that take place.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to encourage the use of Focusing with adolescents and propose the use of drawing as a means of expression. The first objective is to know if adolescents have the ability of Focusing, and the second is to know if sequenced drawing is a good expressive resource for Focusing. In third place, we wish to know if experiential relaxation can help adolescents when doing Focusing.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Thirty-nine students from two baccalaureate forms from a Secondary Institute in the province of Barcelona (Spain) took part in this research ($n = 39$). It was convenient to select the sample making use of the relationship one of the investigators has with the centre and due to the need of having previously carried out various relaxation sessions. We requested the participants to of had at least seven 50minute sessions of Experiential Relaxation Techniques. (López, 2010) during their physical education class, to be able to participate, proven by the Physical Education Department of the centre. Their involvement was voluntary and with an informed consent.

Tools

We used three instruments of our creation: body somatogram, template for the drawing and a Focusing based script-questionnaire.

Body somatogram

This is a tool for bodily conscience proposed by López-González (2011), an empty human silhouette drawn on a white sheet of paper. On it, the user represents the different sorts of psycho corporal signs (sensations, emotions, feelings...) locating and reflecting them as reliably as possible by the means of lines and colouring.

Drawing and sequenced expression template

This is a white sheet divided into six equal parts, three on the upper portion and three underneath so as to successively draw the *felt sense* at three minutes intervals. The initial drawing, placed in the first square, done at minute cero (López-González, 2011).

Guideline-Questionnaire for sequenced drawing focusing

This guide consists of 10 indications regarding the first five steps in Focusing (Table 1).

Table 1

Guideline-Questionnaire for sequenced drawing focusing

QUESTIONNAIRE-GUIDELINE	FOCUSING (step n ^o)
1. Draw the two most disagreeable sensations (here-now).	1 st
2. Draw the two most agreeable sensations (here-now).	1 st
3. Make an inventory of subjects and choose one	1 st
4. Draw the <i>felt-sense</i> .	2 nd and 3 rd
5. Draw the <i>felt-sense</i> every three minutes	4 th
6. What is the worst about feeling all this?	5 th
7. And the best? Is there something good in focusing on this here-now?	5 th

8. What does this sensation encourage you to do? 5th
9. Do you consider you have recognized the felt sense? 2nd and 3rd
-

Procedure

The research took place in a classroom in a centre after school hours. They were given a somatogram, drawing template and the participation rules. The process is defined as the six steps in Focusing:

First step: For approximately five minutes we got prepared. The next five minutes we asked them to draw in the somatogram (corporal silhouette), the two most disagreeable and two most agreeable sensations at that moment. Then they wrote a list of issues that were interfering with their happiness and asked to select one of them.

Second and third step: We suggested they formed a felt sense related to the selected issue and after a brief moment draw it as accurately as possible in the somatogram. Then, as the starting point of the sequence, transfer the drawing into the first space in the expression template. (picture 1, minute 1)

Fourth step: We encouraged them to stay attentive to the felt sense and draw it again every three minutes, after previous notice, a total of five times, so as to fill in the chart with the six drawings.

Fifth step: Once the sequence was concluded, we asked them three questions: What is the worst of this? What is the best? What does it encourage you to do? This ended the process and lastly we asked them: Have you recognized the felt sense? Has there been any change?

Likewise we took into consideration if they had been capable of focusing, if there was a sensed shift and the usefulness they could see in it (viability).

Sixth step: The process closed by encouraging them to protect the experience from the internal critic, savour and stay a few minutes with the possible *body shift*. Put one hand on their chest thanking themselves for the work done during the process.

Data analysis

Four trainer members of *The Focusing Institute of New York* made a qualitative analysis of the work achieved by the 39 adolescents. To do this they used a qualitative chart (appendix x). For the first two points of the guideline there were three different evaluation levels (from 0 to 2) depending on the number of sensations found and drawn. For the rest of indications (from the third to the tenth) the evaluation was a closed question (yes/no)

By common consent the analysis were expressed on an only chart. The experts evaluated the experiential factor in the narrative and plastic expression of the work. That is to say how many adolescents experimented a change in any of the three levels observed: graphic, narrative and experiential.

RESULTS

As can be observed in Table 2, 82% of the adolescents knew how to identify one or two disagreeable sensations (67% and 15% respectively) and 72% identified one or two unpleasant sensations (62% and 10% respectively). Only an 18% could not identify any positive bodily sensation and a 28% could no sense any negative one.

As far as identifying personal problematic issues, 97% of the students were able to list them and the same percentage found it easier to identify the worst (97%) than the best, or positive of what they were focusing (77%). 90% felt an invitation during course of the process, that is to say they could find a directionality when listening to their felt sense.

95% confirmed having been able to distinguish their *felt sense* and 49% of the student's state having experimented changes in their sensation (*body shift*).

Table 2

Results from the Guideline-Questionnaire

	Answers			%		
	0	1	2	0	1	2
1. Disagreeable sensations	7	26	6	18	67	15
2. Agreeable sensations	11	24	4	28	62	10
	Yes		No			
3. List of issues	38		1		97 3	
4. Felt-sense	39		0		100 0	
5. 6 drawings	24		15		62 38	
6. The worst	38		1		97 3	
7. The best	30		9		77 23	
8. Invitation	35		4		90 10	
9. Distinguish felt-sense	37		1		95 3	
10. Evolution of process	19		1		49 3	

Overall valuation on behalf of the trainers

Regarding the obtained results in all cases, on behalf of the trainers (Table 3), the objective was to differentiate the students who had experimented a change on the three levels: graphic, narrative and experiential.

Table 3

Overall valuation on behalf of the trainers

OVERALL VALORATION ON BEHALF OF THE TRAINERS	<i>n</i>	%
Graphic, narrative and experiential changes	15	38
No changes observed (on the three levels)	10	26
Non assessable	14	36
Total	39	100

38% of the students expressed changes that correlated on a graphic, narrative and experiential level whilst 26% did not observe such changes. Due to inadequate or incomprehensible material, 36% were inaccessible, but does not mean that there was no sort of change observed. Probably some of this group experienced some sort of change according to what they expressed in the questionnaire: 49% indicated having experienced an evolution.

Thus of the 19 students who said to have found a progress in their process, we can confirm that after the evaluation of the trainers, 15 of them (38%) show changes that correlate on the three levels (graphic, narrative and experiential). The trainers only rejected four of them.

CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the first objective, the results show how adolescents have an ability to focus their felt sense, similar to that observed in other studies (Mepkyp, 1997; Neagu, 1988) and around a third complete the focusing process and experiment a genuine body shift. This suggests that the whole focus implies certain learning skills and that some focus their felt sense but then don't process it afterwards.

On the other hand, expressing the felt sense with drawings, along with verbal expression, allows adolescents to be in closer contact with their body, which benefits their global feedback.

At the same time, experiential relaxation exercises help adolescents to develop their body consciousness and ability to focus. It is probable that this improves their capacity to focus.

Nevertheless, being an uncontrolled study and all the students being of a same school the fact is it doesn't allow for a generalization of the results. Likewise, it is important to have in count, that some of the 36% of participants presented insufficient matter or did it in an incomprehensible form. This could be due to lack of confidence or comprehension of the procedure.

All the previous, leads to recommend other similar studies in a controlled form, to see if experiential relaxation affects the adolescents' ability to focus. On the other hand, it would be convenient to investigate the causes of why many adolescents don't complete their information. Maybe a better communication and empathy on behalf of the investigators would help.

APPENDICES

Analysis template

	1			2			3		4	
	Positive sensation			Negative sensation			List of issues		Felt-sense	
Answer	0	1	2	0	1	2	Si	No	Si	No
	5			6			7		8	
	6 drawings			The worst			The best		Invitation	
Answer	0	1	2	0	1	2	Si	No	Si	No

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