BOOK REVIEW

**Focusing in Clinical Practice**  
*The Essence of Change*

By Ann Weiser Cornell  
NY, Norton. 2013

Reviewed by Roxanna Erickson Klein PhD, LPC

*Focusing in Clinical Practice* offers professionals a well rounded, easy to read text that delineates Focusing as a potential central element for clinical practice. This 250 page hardbound book offers clarifications about applications as well as a brief overview of the history of Focusing. It can be used as a step-by-step guide to address a broad range of client concerns and includes a chapter specific to working with trauma, addiction and depression. The book is supplemented by a generous listing of references as well as an index. An appendix offers materials that will be of use in working with clients. Of particular interest to clinicians new to this approach, is an appendix that can be used to support clients in their ongoing work.

Eugene Gendlin PhD, is a pioneer. While still in graduate school in the 1950's, he explored ideas that eventually led to the "discovery" of Focusing. Early on, he worked with Carl Rogers, among other notables. Eventually, he became known for the uniqueness of his own style and for his classic text *Focusing*, published in 1978. Interest in his ideas have continued to spread since that time. This book, *Focusing in Clinical Practice*, is of value in that it expresses the ideas in pragmatic, clear ways that allow clinicians to adopt and refine integration of Focusing within the context of clinical practice. On the cover of this work, Gendlin credits author Cornell with working with him for over thirty years and with "knowing as much about focusing" as he does.
Focusing is at once a philosophy and technique wherein the path to problem resolution is identified as coming from within the individual. It relies on the process of learning to explore the self, to accept one's own "felt sense", and to nourish expression of needs so deeply held within that they may be beyond words or logic. Cornell describes Focusing (p 6) as "not a set of techniques or a therapeutic modality of its own. Rather, it is a way of understanding and facilitating what human beings naturally do-- and all have the capacity to do-- when up against the need for change."

The practice of Focusing include developing skills of present orientation and turning attention inward. The term "felt sense" is used to describe a mechanism to discover or direct therapeutic energy. "Felt sense" is described (p xviii) as a "freshly forming, whole bodily sense of some life situation --not the same as simple emotion or thought." Cornell offers straightforward methodology for setting the stage, nurturing clients through the process, and for blending techniques with other therapeutic orientations.

Despite the clarity with which the process is described, it is limited in that this, like other experiential techniques goes beyond cognitive explanation. A novice beginning with this book will be well served to supplement training with contact with other clinicians who use the techniques. Some students may find that actual observation or practice in eliciting change accelerates their own learning process. However, in this age of technology, direction to the growing body of digital knowledge was under emphasized in this work.
While more akin to Person Centered Therapy than Ericksonian approaches, Focusing shares a deep respect for internal wisdom inherent to both of these schools. A commonality shared by Ericksonian approaches and Focusing is reliance on a client generated experiential process to move beyond the present moment in a healthy direction. Acceptance that cognitive insight may or may not accompany change requires self trust for the capacity of one's own inner wisdom. Both methodologies nourish internal search to find a personal, effective, unique and meaningful direction for change. Both approaches rely on individualistic natural processes to generate needed momentum for change.

In *Focusing in Clinical Practice*, Cornell explains the approach in language understandable by those with no background in Focusing yet appreciated by those with a strong background in the techniques. Cornell has earned her reputation as a leading theoretician and international trainer of Focusing. Her ability to express the ideas with clarity and precision give her work an exceptional value. It is the combination of simplicity and complexities that display the elegance of this work.