

BOOK REVIEWS

Eugene T. Gendlin - 'FOCUSING' Everest House, 1978.

I am generally sceptical of and put off by claims that a technique is new and will help anyone with all their problems. When the front cover also says that it is something you can do alone and that you can learn it in a very short time, this added to my suspicions and to the feeling that this was 'too good to be true'. It would be a great pity if this put off other readers. My conclusion, having read the book and having felt sufficiently excited to try out the method with several of the clients that I am working with, is that Gendlin **does** have something useful and new to say.

Basically 'FOCUSING' is a method of attending to your problem in its bodily form and listening for it to tell you something. If, for example, you ask a person to think of their mother, what they experience is a combination of emotions, facts, memories, perceptions, thoughts and wishes. This "all about mother" is called by Gendlin a "felt sense" and it is this felt sense that focusing is trying to reach. By focusing on this felt sense some aspect of it will become clearer and change. This change is felt bodily and is a sign that focusing has actually occurred. However clearly this is expressed it may sound strange and unlikely until one tries it - the old problem of expressing something non-verbal in verbal terms. Focusing is not "thinking about" or "getting in touch with" or "getting immersed in feelings", but an alternative to all three. (Gendlin's use of the word "feeling" is sometimes confusing. He defines it as referring to the felt sense and therefore as something quite different from emotion. However, the fact that "feeling" and "emotion" are used interchangeably by most people, makes it easy for the reader to forget this new meaning. The word "experience" would perhaps be more acceptable in this context.)

Gendlin makes good use of analogies and of examples of work with clients. A simple analogy that I liked was with looking at a picture in an art gallery, where you have to stand back a bit in order to see it properly. There are also useful chapters on difficulties with focusing and what to do about them.

Most books on psychotherapy give the reader no guidance as to what the therapist actually does, and after a time one learns not to ask. 'FOCUSING' does reply to this question, both in the technique itself and in the chapter "Listening Manual". (Most experienced helpers would do well to improve their skills in listening/empathy.) The book will therefore be useful to therapists as well as to those interested primarily in their own growth.

I have used focusing, as described in an earlier article, as part of a course on client-centred therapy which I have held for staff at a psychiatric hospital.

It was usually well received even by people who were very dubious when I had first explained it. Since reading the book I have found it easier to use the technique effectively in working with clients. I have also lent it to friends who have been able to use it themselves and found it helpful.

I entirely recommend this book to anyone interested in their own growth or in working with other people.

Frances Jobling

Tudor Rickards. **Problem Solving Through Creative Analysis.** 198pp. £10.00
Gower Press.

This book was published in 1974. And to give credit where due the ideas presented cover both individual and creative techniques which are highly practical except for one major weakness. They do not give enough emphasis to prejudice and sheer bloody mindedness. In 1974 I think I would have been highly supportive of these ideas; in 1980 I have many doubts.

To put it very simply, if Rickards' techniques worked, he would have by 'Creative Analysis' worked out how to make his book a best seller and had he done so it is doubtful that we would be in our present predicament. The fact that we are is either extremely obscure or due to naked prejudice and greed. Or some factor which escapes me.

It is my personal view that the only answer is through attitudinal change and that, apart from fanaticism, is an extremely complex and evolutionary approach, particularly where vested interests are concerned; and they always are.

The book is a valid and sincere attempt to bring a wider range of thinking and therefore solutions to problems. Though it is rather stodgy reading in parts it deserves a place in the bookshelf of any problem solver.

Mark Matthews

Joanna Ryan. **The Politics of Mental Handicap.** Penguin 1980.

I don't like seeing mentally handicapped people, and I don't like to read books about mental handicap. The last one I had to review - one of the Methuen series - was so awful that I was turned off even more. But this book was by someone I know and like, so I thought it was worth a try at least.

It only took three days of train journeys and bus-stop waits to finish it - I found it absorbing and fascinating. It makes great use of a diary written by someone who worked for six months as a nursing assistant in a large subnormality hospital

- a series of graphic sketches of one terrible place which apparently is not so unusual as one would have hoped.

But there is far more to the book than this diary (and I think the author goes too far in acknowledging the contribution of Frank Thomas - only 31 pages out of 152, and those 31 carefully looked out and made coherent by the author herself): there are excellent chapters on the historical picture and on the political and ideological waves which have influenced the treatment of the mentally handicapped down the years. And there is a very strong chapter on how the field could develop now we have got so much more information on the effects of different practices.

In the end it made me feel that working with the mentally handicapped could be a tremendously valuable learning experience, as long as I had access to a good counsellor or a good group. I could learn so much about my own weaker self, my own attitudes to my internal Mongol, my internal spastic - how I treat them, and what I am doing to them. About how I relate to my most obtuse self - the self that never seems to learn.

This is an inspiring book, and I hope it is read by anyone who has anything at all to do with mentally handicapped people.

Jacqueline Warner

Morton Schatzman. **The Story of Ruth**, Duckworth 1980. £6.95

This is a highly readable and well told story about a woman who was troubled by seeing an apparition of her father, who had raped her at the age of ten, walking around her house and going in and out of her daughter's bedroom. The apparition was apparently solid, and used doors and chairs in the ordinary way, sometimes sitting next to her visitors and laughing. Her father was really alive, so there was no question of ghosts, but no one else could see him or sense him in any way.

Morton Schatzman taught her to take an interest in her power to produce this apparition, and she became able to produce apparitions of her relatives and friends on demand - and to make them disappear on demand, too! She also became able to produce apparitions of herself, and to use them to find out things about her past - eventually being able to become any age she wished, and to describe precisely what was happening at that age.

Some interesting research studies are reported, in which Ruth figured as the subject. Vicky Ripperre gave her the Semantic Differential test and the Twenty Statements test as an adult, as a pretend 15-year old, as a pretend 10-year old, in a 15-year-old memory trance, and in a 10-year-old memory trance. (A memory trance is when she used her own apparition to actually **go back** to the age in question.) As a pretend 15-year-old doing the Twenty Statements

test, she wrote things like:- "I am a girl", "I am alone", "I am shy", "I am in love", "I am late", "I am what I am" and so forth. In a memory trance as a 15-year-old, she wrote this:

"Who am I?"

I am a storm that never arrives
I am a dream I haven't dreamed
I am a song I'll never sing
I am a truth living a lie
I am a boat that never comes
I am a star that's never shown
I am a death that hasn't died
I am a trap that has been sprung
I am a dream that never ends
I am a girl yet I am the wind
I am a heart that aches within
I am a door I can't get in
I am the wind that's never blown
I am a person I've never known
I am a tree reaching for you
I am a bus going nowhere
I am a call you cannot hear
I am away

and can't be

near.

At the end of this book, Ruth is reputed as saying:- "I'd like to see the day when people aren't as afraid as I was to share their strange experiences, even their unhappy ones. I hope the book will help bring that day about."

I hope so too. I liked this book very much, and I think you will.

John Rowan
