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## FOCUS ON: Heijo Feuerstein and Dieter Müller

by Ellen Kirschner, M.A., Member, USA



*Heijo Feuerstein, coordinator, Focusing-Trainer, Psychotherapist, is Co-director of the Focusing Zentrum Karlsruhe and professor for applied psychology at the FH Kehl, University for Applied Sciences (Public Management).*

Heinz-Joachim Feuerstein (Heijo) and Dieter Müller met in the late 1970s while training as Client-Centered therapists in Heidelberg, Germany. While they shared common interests in psychology and training, they were dissimilar in personality and style. They saw that their differences complemented each other, and that together they would make a strong team.

"My first experience with Focusing was really frustrating," recalled Heijo. "In 1978 I read a German book on Client-Centered therapy in which one chapter dealt with Focusing." Heijo tried out the instructions with a colleague and neither was very impressed. "But somehow," said Heijo, "I did not give up."

Dieter, meanwhile, had his first taste of Focusing in a workshop given by Linda Olson. "I had always felt that something was missing in Client-Centered therapy," he said. When he experienced Focusing he felt right away that it filled the gap.

"Sometimes in Client-Centered we got stuck in talking and did not get to the heart of the matter," he explained. "Focusing provided a way in."

Eager to learn Focusing at the source, Heijo and Dieter decided to find a way to go to Chicago. They approached the editor of the German edition of *Psychology Today* with a proposal to interview Gene, and he agreed. Dieter recalled their surprise when they arrived in Chicago in 1983. "I expected a big institute like the Client-Centered Institute in Germany," he said, "but all we found was a mailbox!"

Their experience of Focusing, on the other hand, and of the way Gene worked with people, far exceeded their expectations. They were able to interview Gene in German, which enhanced their understanding.

"I was impressed by the clear and fascinating way to Focus on real occurring inner processes," said Heijo, "not by exercises or playful devices, but really directly."

From then on they returned every year to week-long trainings and conferences. In 1986 they were certified as trainers, and the following year, with Rheinhard Fuchs



(who died prematurely in 1991) they founded their center, the Focusing Zentrum Karlsruhe (FZK). In 1994 they organized the first International Conference to be held outside of Chicago in Pforzheim, Germany. It was held there again in 1997 and 2000 and will return there this spring. Over the past 16 years, Dieter and Heijo have taught more than 1000 people to Focus. With Hans Jurgen Heringer, a linguist at the University of Augsburg, they developed CD-ROMS on Dreamwork, Coping with Chronic Pain, Decision Making, and guided imagery to further intercultural empathy.

*Dieter commutes between Germany and Greece to teach Focusing. These lines are from a favorite poem which express his feeling about Greece. "Keep Ithaka always in your mind. Arriving there is what you are destined for. But do not hurry the journey at all. Better if it lasts for years, so you are old by the time you reach the island, wealthy with all you gained on the way, not expecting Ithaka to make you rich."*  
by C. P. Cavafy

The main focus at the FZK is to cross the experiential approach with traditional concepts and psychological methods. It is not enough simply to add Focusing to other approaches, they explained. The goal is to redesign and rethink the traditional forms of the profession from the experiential viewpoint. For example, instead of Counselling, Coaching, Supervision and Focusing the FZK offers Experiential Supervision, Experiential Coaching, and Experiential Counseling. Dieter and Heijo have always encouraged their trainees to create their own concepts. One graduate uses Focusing as part of a basic training for actors. Another has applied it to Speaking Circles. A new approach integrating Focusing with "hippo therapy" (therapy on horseback for hyperactive children) was developed by FZK graduate Kurt Schley. Kurt brought his horses to the last International in Germany to present his work.

"My roots in Focusing go back to my initial client-centred training," said Heijo. "I got to know the depths of the experiential approach in steps. The vague concept of organismic valuing, which I knew from Carl Rogers, became very concise. The intensive experience with Focusing – as both client and therapist – transformed my understanding of change and relationship in all kinds of psychological work including therapy, supervision, coaching, training, and consulting.

"Moreover, Gene's process concept of the felt sense was an example of something of general interest for me: how can we make a kind of concept that allows us to make precise use of psychological concepts in practice and every day life – not the naïve way that simple rules are made for everyone at anytime like certain rigid religious laws, but the art of bringing general concepts back into the specific experienced person-in-situation constellation, re-animating the canned life experience and making change by making sense? The felt body as the missing link between general concepts and the person-in-situation completes the process of pro-life change. This experiential approach has proven as helpful in my personal life as in my professional work

Said Dieter, "Focusing is the core method for me, something that is always present, whether I am acting as therapist or supervisor. Other methods are used, but Focusing is the most important. For any big decisions in my life I have checked with Focusing. And the Focusing community is very special. In other scientific communities there is very much discussion and mind stuff. The Focusing community is more complete. Not only is there mind and thinking, but feelings, connection and friendships -- everything.

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