

Online Events – Gloria Revisited

Live Counselling Session 4 – Focusing-Oriented Therapy – 4.7.16

John Threadgold Counsels Mike Trier

What did you think of the issue?

From a focusing perspective the process of how an issue is worked with is more important than the content of the issue. Almost any issue will do. In focusing theory all of our issues are interconnected. When we explore and process one issue it will frequently have an impact on the whole person and different aspects and layers will emerge during the process. The issue of whether to move to a new home is, in one sense a surface issue. However as we discovered there were lots of pre-conceptual implicit dimensions that fed into that issue that were operating below the radar. In my view Focusing-oriented Therapy (FOT) helped Mike to get a better sense of the underlying dynamics of the issue as well as helping Mike to process the issue in an experiential way.

Did you have any plans/strategies before starting?

I talked the issue through with Mike before our session and I outlined and agreed a potential way of working with Mike on this. Given the time limit on the issue I wanted to make sure that Mike was safe during the session and that any deeper aspects that emerged could be contained in a safe way. An example was when Mike realised that the sadness associated with the move, was also linked to other past (unresolved) issues. I respected Mike's autonomy in his decision not to go there. The idea incorporated into the session of promising to return at a later time, often has the effect of making sure that the client is not left with raw and potentially uncontained feelings at the end of the session. I believe this happened with Mike although of course Mike would know if this is true for sure.

Were there any key parts of the work?

Focusing-oriented Therapy is therapy that invites the client to engage with pre-conceptual and pre-verbal aspects of the issue. The body is regarded as the unconscious. I often find it useful thereof or to invite the client to ground and be in touch with their body. I also invited Mike to slow down the process. This allowed Mike to become more aware of his bodily sensations, feelings and emotions. I also invited Mike to test out his thinking against his bodily felt sense of the issues. This helped to facilitate Mike into an unfolding experiential process as the issues unfold, he can both gain new information about the decision, and experience the issue beginning to shift and feel different. In FOT as the issue feels different and tension is released, new thinking and behaviour then emerge from the experiential process. I think that this began to happen in the 20 minute session that we had. Mike of course is the only person who can say for sure if this happened.

Were you aware of any choices during the session?

No, the whole session seemed to flow in an expansive experiential way. I guess with hindsight alternative responses could have been made, but during the session I felt that I resonated with Mike and operated from that place of being.

Were you influenced by what had gone before?

I did look at the three previous sessions. I felt that I could use almost any of what was offered, but would do so in a Focusing-Oriented way. I may have been influenced, but I think that any influence was implicit and outside of my conscious awareness. I was not explicitly influenced by the previous sessions.

How do you feel it went?

I feel that the session went well given the time constraints.

Were you nervous being in front of an audience?

I had a small degree of nervousness to begin with. But as the session progressed I completely forgot about the audience being there. And when I was discussing theory and practice with John I completely lost any nervousness that I had, as I enjoy this aspect of my work.

Do you feel you were able to demonstrate your approach?

Yes. Key parts of my approach include creating a safe space or place, using reflective listening and deepening propositions, to invite Mike to explore the issue on a pre-conceptual level. I think that this worked very well and gave a small insight into how FOT works. So in a word. Yes! FOT is a broad, wider deep and rich approach to therapy, I hope that people got a glimpse of that from the 20 minute session.

Was there anything you could have done differently?

I am not sure about this. My own 'inner critic' told me that I went too fast during the session. Feedback from Mike was that I invited him to slow the process down, and that I also slowed it down through my responses. So I guess my 'critic' was not correct concerning this matter. I still have a nagging doubt that perhaps I should have slowed my responses down even more. But I am not sure about it.

Do you have any views about being directive, staying with the client's frame of reference, being past, present or future centred, being focused on finding solutions, giving space for the client to offload or reflect on their issues?

I regard myself as a Focusing–Oriented person centred and integrative therapist. I am non-directive when it comes to the content of the session. The client can bring whatever they choose to the session and that is okay with me. I am also suggestive (rather than directive) when it comes to client process. In other words, through body awareness, reflective listening, where my reflections contain the implicit question, ‘is this the way it is for you?’ And also through slowing down the process, I am inviting Mike to have a greater experiential sense of his own frame of reference. Another way of putting it, is that I am offering Rogers ‘core conditions’ to Mike, and I am then inviting Mike to explore and offer those conditions to his own inner experiencing, to treat his own inner frame of reference, both explicit and implicit with gentle non-judgemental curiosity. Mike becomes more self-empathic, really exploring the dynamics that lie underneath the decision, and he also moves toward greater congruence, as his thinking and feelings begin to match and integrate. If we had gone on to do more sessions, then future sessions could also have looked at a way forward with the decision. For example we could have explored different options, (such as staying put and monitoring the situation, looking for a new property without a commitment to buying etc) and tested those against his ‘bodily felt sense’ of the situation. Doing several sessions, it is likely that his configurations of self would come together to find a new way forward that was congruent for him. However this was not possible as we only had one session.

Anything else?

I really enjoyed the session with Mike. I would love to do some more sessions with him including guided Focusing, where we could explore and integrate the past dynamics that are still operating, and also look at where forward moving life energy is in relation to this decision.

Some useful links:

The Focusing Institute: <http://www.focusing.org/>

British Focusing Association: <http://www.focusing.org.uk/>

My own web site including other focusing links: <http://www.newfocustherapy.co.uk>