

FOCUSING-INFORMED TECHNIQUES FOR GROUNDING FOR THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF THE CREATIVE ARTS

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Grounding is crucial for building trust and safety to process person-centred creative arts. From the standpoint of my experiences as a Focusing teacher offering international workshops in Focusing-informed Creative Arts, grounding can be more than practicing a body-check or breathing exercise.

In this article I want to present two approaches for grounding that can be useful for creative arts practitioners, especially when working with clients in trauma-informed settings. The first approach is Focusing-informed grounding as a Pre-Focusing technique before stepping into the therapeutic process. I call it 'Taking Up Space'. The second approach 'Dynamic Shape Drawing' comes from anthroposophical art therapy and introduces to drawing exercises especially designed for grounding.

Grounding starts with taking place in the environment, as the living body is constantly screening environmental conditions: are they helpful to carry further the body's moving forward direction, or are they not? (Gendlin in Frie, 2003).

Working with individuals in psychotherapy, counselling and art therapy, and with heterogeneous groups, I use grounding techniques from different sources. 'Taking up space' as explained below is a Focusing-informed technique of environmental grounding that can be introductory to any engagement with the therapeutic arts (Creative Arts, Expressive Arts, Arts in Psychotherapy). I developed this technique as a user-friendly method inducing FOAT® based 'Clearing a Space' (Rappaport 2009) (FOAT®: Focusing Oriented Expressive Arts).

To get the most of both approaches as reader, I am going to present the environmental grounding technique 'Taking Up Space' as a preparation for the embodied grounding method of Dynamic Shape Drawing (DSD for short). A Focusing-informed DSD worksheet for creative arts practitioners will be included alongside this article (see QR Code).

DSD has been developed during the 50s by Herman Kirchner (1899 - 1978), a German artist and special education teacher, whose body of work is in the tradition of

anthroposophical Fine Art. Kirchner believed in art as therapy. He designed DSD exercises from body movements to help students experience a sense of self, kinaesthetic ownership and well-being. His exercises were not to teach drawing skills but to support students with special needs in social, mental and emotional upbringing to get along with self-regulation difficulties (Bühler, Rau 1986).

Another source of development comes from the Swiss anthroposophical teacher Rudolf Kutzli (1915 – 1998) who founded the first Rudolf-Steiner Residential School in Switzerland, the École-Famille-Montolieu. His curriculum incorporated DSD shapes referring to the age group and the effectiveness of the drawing activity on the physical-mental-spiritual organism of the individual student. In designing developmentally appropriate shapes, Kutzli took reference to the archaic stone carving of the Lombards and the line art of the Celts (Gronenborn, 2021). Kutzli established DSD as a teaching subject in Waldorf Schools. His popular public presentations and seminars from 1969 on, and his activities as a publisher (1981 – 1987) made DSD a method taught in Waldorf Schools even today (Kutzli, 2013). DSD can also be used as a resource oriented method in clinical art therapy with adaption to the needs of e.g. very vulnerable clients (being traditionally diagnosed as patients suffering from early or severe disturbances such as schizophrenia, personality disorder, depression or somatophoric disorders) (Gronenborn, 2021).

Using DSD in Focusing-informed ways, DSD connects to the inner space and allows FOAT based 'Clearing a Space' at the same time, as my students in DSD workshops did record. I therefore call DSD an art-informed approach of 'Clearing a Space' with reference to the approach 'Arts-Focusing' by Rappaport (Rappaport in Malchiodi 2023).

DSD is introduced in this article with a tuning-in exercise, an art directive and a visual template of different shapes (simple and complex) that has been created by my former German art therapist teacher Miriam Gronenborn, lecturer at the Catholic University of Applied Sciences Freiburg, Germany. Gronenborn uses DSD for

hospitalized psychiatric clients and learned DSD herself at art academy where she practiced DSD as daily artful meditation before starting to paint (Gronenborn in personal conversation). I recommend introducing clients to the construction of the different DSD shapes first, before using DSD as a therapeutic method.

DSD can be used as a warm up, as a creative arts exercise on its own and as a pre- and post-indicator for changes in the inner landscape of the client during sessions (the range of harmonious change of the outlined shape indicates the change of the client's wellbeing). DSD is also helpful for the professional in terms of self-care: rebalancing inner states occurs in natural ways during practice as it has become evident in my teaching workshops with Focusing professionals, psychotherapists, counsellors, art therapists and expressive arts facilitators. I want to highlight two teaching workshops, the first one live in presence, the second one online:

- 'Creative Compassion: Building Relational Empathy With Expressive Arts Focusing', May 13, 2023, Annual Gathering of the German Focusing Society DFG, Heidelberg, GER.
- 'Introduction to Expressive Arts Focusing Hands-on Methods: Finding Ground in Experiential Arts. Roots, Branches, and Wings Series with Pioneers and Master Teachers, April 19, 2024, Focusing and Expressive Arts Institute'.

Participants reported of 'coming home' by DSD, getting deeply in touch with their inner sense of self. They felt more grounded, centered, calm, at peace, and aligned to their own rhythmicity.

Person-centred creative arts practitioners might use DSD in their own practice after having experimented with DSD for themselves. Personal experience with DSD is a prerequisite to pass it on to others, and knowing about one's own reactions to DSD helps practitioners be in presence while guiding their clients.

References

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For more information about Dynamic Shape Drawing DSD or 'Clearing a Space' as FOAT® approach, please reach out to: FOCUSZART The Focusing Studio, focuszart@email.de <https://artsfocusing.com/>



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Taking up Space: A Focusing-informed Technique For Grounding

Setting the art table: Clear off all items that remind you of office work or your daily work activities you do at this table. It's worth the extra effort to check if there is any extra items that could be placed aside to improve your comfort.

Now check if you have the art materials you would like to use at hand. Arrange them on your table in ways you feel comfortable with. Perhaps try out different ways of placing them, waiting for a body shift to come. A body shift is a spontaneous breathing relief, indicating your body has found an inner place of feeling okay with where you put down your art materials.

Now that your art table is set, explore the space on your table with your hands. Use both your palms. Get into sensing the surface of the table, its extension, its material, the texture of the material and the temperature of the material (bilateral sensorimotor grounding).

Allow yourself to feel how it is to be with this space on your art table, which now is your second ground for experiencing (the first ground is the floor).

Exploring the space around the table: Now stretch your arms around you. Sense the distance to items in your room (a chair, the wall, a plant etc.). Check against your body, if there is enough room to truly feel comfortable with your space as a whole. It's worth the extra effort to make sure you feel comfortable.

Remove things in the room that are in the way. Now stretch, and sense what it's like to have made your space a living environment serving you.

Additional Resources

Scan the QR Code to download the PDF of 'Focusing-informed DSD Worksheet for Creative Arts Practitioners'

