

USING THE MANDALA WITH CHILDREN OR ADULTS BY LUCY BOWERS©

Mandalas offer a follow-up that can be used at any age. Mandala is a Sanskrit word which means circle. It is a universal image, the oldest symbol of essence, oneness. It is meant to help concentration by narrowing down the psychic field of vision and restricting it to the centre. Mandalas have been drawn, danced and built since pre-historic times. Carl Jung drew one Mandala per day to help him in his individuation process.

Ancient symbology and hidden meanings is resonant with Focusing and Mandalas reflect that intent as they show one thing and invite the viewer to discover a deeper meaning not always consciously.

To have children symbolize their Felt Sense using the Mandala is to offer them a safe container in which to continue the process and to experiment. It is recommended, whether it be a class or individual, that the work be done in silence. The colours can come from paint, crayons, pastels, coloured pencils, chalk, whatever is desired. The circles can also be of any chosen size. It is my suggestion that the Felt Sense allow the colours to be chosen and then each stroke in the circle will somehow invite the next stroke and the next one, until the Felt Sense allows the awareness to know that the Mandala is complete.

There are a variety of ways to introduce this activity depending on age or circumstances that suit the situation. This can be a 1 or 2 day exercise or one over the space of a minimum of one hour or more with adults, with young children especially one to one, perhaps 5 to 10 minutes. Your own Felt Sense and experience will help you decide how you go forward with this. It always follows a Felt Sensing or a Focusing experience in either a workshop or classroom or one to one setting.

Part One (Done in silence)

1. The invitation is to "let your body (or your hand or your heart or whatever has presented something...) draw how it is feeling after thiswhatever has come. One would mirror the words given about that Felt Sense experience.

Now I sometimes have them choose from a range of circles (pot lids or dishes etc) that can be traced to create a circle appropriate in size for the situation. Depending on time restrictions either I or the Focuser makes the decision about what size the circle might be. When I decide, I will have a circle (perhaps the size of a dinner plate) drawn and ready to go on a square piece of paper.

2. Instructions include the following: (After they have their circles and their medium chosen)

- * allow your body (or your hand or your heart or whatever) to decide what medium it wants to use ... I usually offer 3 choices no more, but it could be paints, pastels, crayons, markers fat or skinny, coloured pencils etc. The Felt Sense will be attracted to just the right medium for the task at hand.
- * we ask you stay within the circle only and please allow whatever comes to appear there without judgment. (usually adults not children need to hear this)
- *allow your body to know when it is enough or finished or completed.
- * when you are finished please quietly go and:
 - a) read one of the books I have laid out until everyone is finished or
 - b) do some journaling (again whatever is age appropriate) as we try to maintain an atmosphere of silence for those still working.

I usually have a dozen or more illustrated children's books that I have collected over the years that allow for felt sensing to be nurtured. I also have special paper and pens that can be used to journal whatever has transpired. I often have them put a date on it and encourage them with the invitation to do this for a week daily, or perhaps a month to see and understand their emotional landscape in this visual way.

Part Two (Done in silence)

If time and willingness is available part two works best with children over the age of 8 or a grade 3 class and up.

Assuming there are at least 5 or 6 newly created Mandalas; have them laid out in a space on the floor creating a circle with them. I would have two circles if the group is bigger than 20 or maybe even 3 if space allows and if there are 24 or more. Let us pretend there are 6 for these purposes.

Each person now has 6 small bits of paper and a pen or pencil. They move in a clockwise direction allowing the distance offered by their **standing position** and the floor where each of these mandalas is lying and check their own Felt Sense response as they take in what is there. This distance is important to get the Felt Sense of the whole of it.

Allowing a word or a phrase to come forward within the very first minute or less (somewhat like the double empathic moment we use in Dr. Janet Klein's Interactive Focusing) we capture it and record it. No judgment needed or wanted, the word or phrase needs not to have meaning it just needs to be recorded on the piece of paper and placed beside or above but **not on**, in any way, the Mandala itself. (**upside down so as not to be seen/read to influence the Felt Sense of the next person that comes along.**) Each person sees the Mandala unencumbered by those little blank papers collecting

there. In this way the group moves slowly and again without comment in total silence around the circle placing their "little gift" of a word or phrase along side each other's Mandalas, including their own as if seeing it for the first time. I suggest from experience their own be the last one they finish with not the one they start with.

Once everyone is back standing by their own Mandala they are asked to sit in some comfortable spot with their "little gifts " as I like to call them, offering a paper and pencil to create a tiny poem with the words given. (actually size of the poem is not applicable nor a formal definition of poetry)

Everyone is always amazed at how easy it is to do so even when they tell me they have never written a poem before. They can add or subtract or repeat but I encourage them not to embellish, stay with the Felt Sense, don't try to make meaning happen and just **ALLOW** to come what wants to come.

I love reminding adults (children never seem to need this reminder) that their bodies are doing this exercise and their bodies are having an opportunity they seldom get to express themselves and to communicate in this way.

Part 3 (Again, if time and willingness allow)

A sharing is always very rich and valuable. I tell people they can pass and only those who wish should share but it has never happened that the reluctant ones do not end up sharing as well. I have never in all the years of doing this, found that someone left the workshop without sharing. It is so important to note they are feeling safe because you have created this safe container from the very beginning, be it the circle on the paper or the circle of those bodies participating.

The Sharing:

I hold up the Mandala for everyone to see so that the brain is taking in the visual through the eyes and while the poem is being read by the participant with their own intonation and their emphasis etc. the brain is allowed to take all that in through the ears simultaneously. The combination continues a felt sensing experience that is often responded to by a soft "wow!" from the group. I do this twice however trying to mimic the expression by my reading of the poem and allowing the individual to see and hear it for themselves simultaneously. This way the group actually gets each one twice.

A facilitator needs a lot of time and space to do this Part Three reverently always nurturing the Felt Senses as they come with compassion and empathy and with love. This is how I see the Focusing Attitude developed and

experienced, understood, practiced and learned for internal integration of a larger process.

Another outcome is the strong sense of interconnection experienced as each one sees how their "little gift " has been placed into what is becoming a meaningful context for each participant.

I have had teachers who have used Part One as an opening to the day in their student's ongoing daily journals over the space of a year. An art book with blank pages works very well for this type of journaling.

Some have done this at the end of the day, but I sense the beginning of the day is a wonderful way of getting into the body and letting go of all that has transpired at home prior to coming to school or en route.

I see this used as a sense of self exercise or attunement that is well received by students of any age. It is the nonverbal aspect for 15 or 20 minutes combined with silence that I think is better than any mindfulness exercise presently popular in the classrooms of North America. I say that because "meaning" is often an unexpected outcome. "Surprise" is an element that continues to make Focusing so appealing to those who practice it. The Felt Shift is an invaluable outcome allowing change to happen and be noticed.

The option to do Parts two or three could be one once a week or once a month and offers a wonderful record of their emotional landscape and the sense of changes over time, or let us say over the course of the year. For ages 12, 13 and up it has been very nonthreatening and success oriented where sometimes tasting success is a sparse happening in the lives of some of these youth.

I would very much like to have feedback from anyone using these ideas. In particular, I desire to hear about ways to adapt and make changes in accommodating the various situations and age groups. What was your experience of success or confusion or failure?? What have you done to adapt to various age groups? circumstances? cultural or gender differences? Your questions and feedback will be very much appreciated.

Lucy Bowers +1 416 690 4862
Certifying Coordinator, Focusing Trainer and Teacher
The International Focusing Institute N.Y. www.focusing.org
The Learning Zone Toronto www.focusinginthelearningzone.weebly.com
Skype: <lucyatthelearningzone>
Email: lucybowers@sympatico.ca