

WHAT IS OPEN FOCUS?

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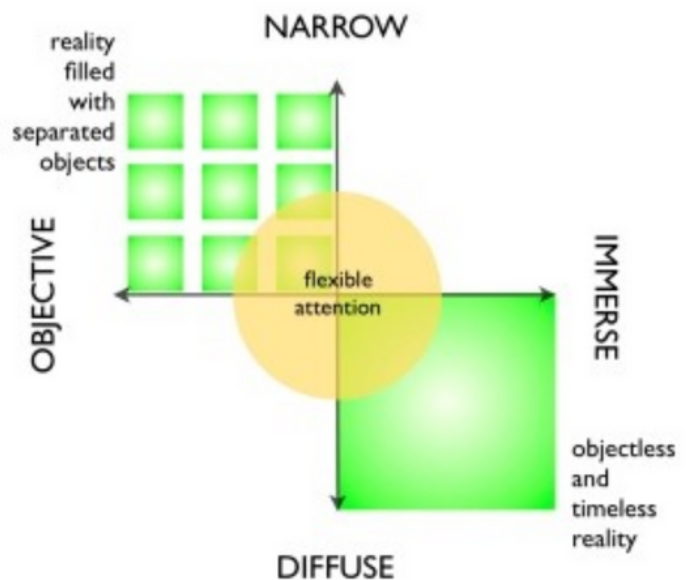
Open Focus

Open Focus is the name of an attention training program created by Dr Lester Fehmi, neuroscientist and psychologist from Princeton, US. Dr Fehmi found that once our *whole brain electric activity becomes more synchronous in alpha frequency*, our mental and physical health improves. He created a series of mind exercises which help to cultivate this brain wave pattern and he designed a neuro-feedback EEG machine which can detect it.

On the basis of his findings, Dr Fehmi developed The Four Attention Styles theory. This theory describes four different styles we can pay attention and relates these styles to the brain physiology.

According to Dr Fehmi, pain, stress, anxiety and life's challenges make our attention **narrow and objective**. It is natural to **narrow** our attention (to focus) on pain or a problem in order to deal with it efficiently but most people overuse this style in everyday life. They are unaware that it keeps them us in continuous "flight and fight" mode. Moreover habitual focusing creates an impression that the reality consists of separated **objects**. It is because we can focus on only one thing or a sensation at the time leaving the rest outside of our focus. It can make us feel distant, alienated and lonely.

Dr Fehmi says, we can support ourselves in relating to what's difficult in a more balanced, accepting way by **diffusing** (broadening, opening focus of) our attention. **Diffusing** allows us to see the big picture and connect (**immerse**) with its elements. It helps to realign with the world and to create healthy relationships. This style is linked to 'rest and digest' part of our physiology and makes the whole brain activity more synchronous in alpha frequency which can be confirmed by Dr Fehmi's machine (see graph to right).



Dr Fehmi suggests everyone should be flexible in paying attention. It means that you can alternate between **'narrow and objective'** and **'diffused and immersed'** styles of attention or balance all at the same time. Dr Fehmi says, that the way we pay attention is directly linked to our well-being. **It means that once you are able to balance your attention you can positively influence your mind and body.**

During Open Focus training we practise diffusing by becoming simultaneously aware of many *objects*. *The object* can be everything you can focus on like a physical object, a sound, a taste, a thought, a feeling, sensation from the body, etc. Then you can progress to awareness of space between objects (it might be space between physical objects, silence between sounds or breaks between thoughts, etc). Finally you become aware of space between and inside objects which according to Dr Fehmi helps us attending in 'diffused and immersed' style. In this style of attending all objects (including you) dissolve in space and you immerse with reality becoming fully connected.

Are Mindfulness and Open Focus complementary?

Open Focus and Mindfulness are not distinct and competing practices but rather highly complementary. Mindfulness helps us to learn to pay attention to our experience and to notice how we are relating to this experience. Open Focus then builds upon the benefits and skills of Mindfulness by training us not just to pay attention but to be more aware of how we are paying attention and to be more flexible in our attention styles.

We then have the benefits of two complementary practices available to us; learning to pay attention and being flexible in how we pay attention. We could say that Mindfulness is an excellent foundation for Open Focus training and that Open Focus helps us to get the most from Mindfulness training.

	Mindfulness	Open Focus
main message	pay attention in a certain way	notice how you pay attention
skill to be achieved	not react but respond	become attention flexible
attention style	mostly narrow	narrow/diffused objective/immersed
where from	origins from ancient mediation styles	developed by scientist on the base of a neurofeedback research
how developed	from psychology to neuroscience	from neuroscience to psychology