

Valerie Rose

Some thoughts on RC Application

Based on discussion groups at the Re-evaluation Co-counselling Workshop.

I have been trying to collect my thoughts on Re-evaluation Counselling (RC) and its application in the community at large following the recent workshop at Arundel. I am beginning to wonder whether it can be applied or whether, more in the nature of a religion, it can only be lived and sought. It is a therapy that is not limited by disease, extending consciousness far beyond the 'normal', and reaching possibly into areas of healing previously considered purely medical.

For those unfamiliar with the method I would refer them to the literature on the subject, but briefly it is a peer-group counselling method on a one-to-one basis, each individual having a turn both as counsellor and as client; the purpose being to break old fixed patterns of behaviour by discharging the emotion (in tears, anger, laughter, shaking, etc.) that binds them to us². There are various skills and techniques available and taught for this purpose. The breaking down of these fixed patterns leads to a release of energy, creativity and rationality. The method is taught in classes and there are ongoing groups to maintain and refresh the teaching.

Perhaps the most significant application of Re-evaluation Counselling is the spillover into the community, from existing co-counsellors, not only of their creativeness and life-enhancing attitudes, but also of their use of the RC principles of validation of self and others and discharge of emotion in their everyday lives in public. This may call for some

calculated risk-taking; that is, in stressful situations they express their grief, fear, embarrassment, anger, etc. and show that these feelings are allowable and valid and not a sign of weakness, and that these expressions come from people who, though vulnerable, are able to carry out exacting and responsible tasks.

Lowering the threshold at which the expression of emotion is permissible in the community could be important to the future of our culture as the greater the amount of suffering experienced before it seems permissible to show emotion, the more possible it is for suffering to be inflicted on us below and up to that point. Obviously the increase in maturity of anyone who 'grows' affects everyone who comes into contact with him/her, and many of the applications discussed at the Arundel workshop could be better described as the influence of RC on the co-counsellors beginning to show. This is happening particularly in families, schools, colleges and social work situations.

In the only instances I could find at the workshop where RC had been purposely applied the consequences would seem to be more mixed. One household whose membership had been built up on the basis of RC principles thrived for some time in a very good atmosphere which was often remarked by outsiders. Eventually RC itself became the issue which led to the splitting up of the group. In another instance a group of parents in a community project were,

through their experience of RC, consolidated as a group and became stronger in self-interest and as a result formed their own kindergarten school which they continued to control. It was hoped that the stronger self-interest would make them a more powerful pressure group but it had not yet been proved that this group would also be more ready to listen to others or be more rational.

Bringing validation into depressed communities was a goal many were striving for as a first step in righting wrong. In our own time black power (black is beautiful), women's lib., recognition of the rights of the mentally ill and handicapped, and the Mexican grape pickers are a few examples of groups who have needed validation to give them the necessary energy to emerge as people. Though it is a marvellous antidote to pessimism, validation must be tempered with awareness and validation of other groups or what is to stop it turning into an instrument of oppression as the self-pride introduced by Hitler to re-establish the German people after the first World War degenerated into the concept of the Herrenvolk with all its consequences. Even in RC communities, because there is no vehicle for dealing directly with negative feelings in actual situations, there seems to be a pervasive declension - I am rational - He is patterned - You need to discharge on that! and RC groups are discouraged from validating other forms of therapy.

In working class communities there was found to be a particular resistance to validation, at least on a personal level. It has been reasoned that as long as survival values are uppermost there is bound to be a reluctance to look inwards, and it was found that RC

principles could only be accepted when they were introduced by already trusted leaders - there was a lot of suspicion of RC's middle class orientation.

There were several other difficulties arising in local close-knit RC groups; confidentiality discipline was one. There cannot be effective counselling when confidential personal detail might be repeated outside the group. Physical closeness is open to misinterpretation outside the group, and it is possible for compulsive characters to do so within the group. The need for discipline in these and other areas is provoking more and more guide-lines and directives from the centre. A kind of moral structure is being erected which has to my mind all the weaknesses that are found in other organised religions. The publication of leaflets from Seattle telling co-counsellors how to behave in several aspects of their lives allows Harvey Jackins to assume an authority which will in turn create a dependency undermining personal responsibility. At Arundel unapproved behaviour was described as 'inhuman' and 'not what RC was about'. For myself I do not give anyone the authority to tell me how to behave. If RC works, and I believe it does, it will show itself in my behaviour but moral directives either provoke resistance or a rather sickly conformity.

I really want to raise these points as questions more than answers and to get through some of the woolly euphoria to what is really being done. I speak as one who feels that RC is a fantastic tool for self growth which joins therapy, poetry, the body and feelings together in one fell swoop and it has an overwhelming importance for me, but I am embarrassed by some of the adulation I saw at Arundel and also by some of the claims made for Re-evaluation

Counselling. I am not yet convinced that I can discharge this embarrassment by laughing.

References

1. I have myself been brought to tears on uttering the word 'marrow' when describing

the feeling of deprivation as being a constriction in the marrow of my bones. I have known others to discharge on acne; and the healing benefits of RC in cases of accident, operations, etc. are described in the Elementary Co-Counsellors Manual.

2. Re-evaluation Therapy: Theoretical Framework (Bernard Somers) (Rational Island Publishers, Seattle.)

Mary Krejzl

Encounter Conflicts

I enjoy attending encounter groups. They have helped me a great deal and I believe in their therapeutic qualities.

Whilst I agree with most of what occurs at encounter groups, I feel that some of the beliefs and practices often produce strange paradoxes. My reaction to these may merely reveal my personal inadequacies, but I would like to express what I have experienced all the same.

Caring.

Those concerned with encounter groups consider it important that the natural ability of one person to empathize with the feelings of another should be allowed to develop freely. I agree, but I also detect strange misunderstandings emerging from this belief: these can be epitomised in the word 'care'. Everybody must 'care' for everybody else at encounter groups. But what if I see that you are genuinely distressed yet I do not care? I will not admit that this is so. The result is often a kind of feigned caring. You begin to cry and everybody instantly 'cares'. You are already distressed and are driven to a state of deeper distress because you can sense that the other members are ingenuine in their feelings.

Somebody whom I love is paying you more attention that I would wish and

you are responding. I feel jealous, but I must not feel jealous because I believe that you should be free to do as you wish. So I deny my feelings.

You express your negative feelings about me and I must accept what you have said because I believe you are free to say what you please. Yet I am hurt. So I deny these feelings.

From now on, I want to admit all my feelings, however irrational they may be, however much they do not coincide with my 'progressive' beliefs, however much I wish I did not own these feelings, however much you may resent me.

I believe in freedom of the individual, yet to what extent will you allow me to be free? At this encounter group I do not wish to participate. You are thrown into conflict. You think that everybody should participate at encounter groups - people need the support - if everybody opted out then there would be no group left - and you have paid good money. Yet you believe that I should be free to do as I wish. You are confused and you start to lecture me, telling me what I should do. Resent me if you wish, but why should I live up to your expectations? Your demands that I should participate occupy my mind to such an extent that I lose the spontaneity of wanting to join in.