

Conflict and Co-operation between Groups, and their relevance to community work

Continued from last month

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Training to some extent can and will help such workers to allow themselves to be effective in this non-directive approach but unless the basic personality is agreeable to this approach the training will take a very long time and can never be fully effective. I would therefore urge that the basic sympathies of the worker are first established so that a great deal of disappointment and hardship can be avoided later on. There are various methods, some of the group methods, which can establish this basic nature or feelings which underly the approach to this work. I have seen group leaders who are mainly interested in their own leadership and how this can be put over to a group, and I have seen the effects of this on the group. A test carried out in the States among a group of students has indicated that authoritatively lead groups can have rather damaging after-effects in terms of breakdown or inability to face reality for some days or weeks afterwards, while the most non-directive groups had no such upsetting effects to that extent. Some T-Groups in this country have now collected such a bad reputation in industry, in terms of leave required by the participants afterwards, that they are being discontinued, and I fear that, unless this is well understood, all group work may be tarred by the same brush.

We have so far discussed the individual and his attitude to the group or within the group, either in a closed group or in the wider sense of community group, or

even the society in which he moves. The community worker is also concerned with the relationship between groups, as is the trade unionist, the labour relations man, a member of parliament, politician, committee member, or indeed anyone whose group impinges in any way on other groups. Yet precious little work has been done on the effects groups have on each other and how they relate to each other.

To illustrate this effect, we set up a group of about 20 people for a weekend seminar. Two groups of ten people each, men and women, ages 25 to about 50. Some had met before but had met for the first time only the previous day. I told them that the exercise was to see how groups relate to each other. Before I can relate to anyone, I said, I have to be reasonably confident of my own identity, and then find ways of exploring the other. For instance, each group could decide on who they were, establish their own identity, their own needs and resources, and then find out about the other group by sending someone along or by any other means, find out about their needs and what they may have to offer.

The conversation and arguments ensuing in each group were taped and transcribed and appeared in the August 73 issue of *'Self and Society'*. The phrases used were an expression of their own feelings about themselves and each other. When I played back to them what they had said, afterwards, they could hardly believe the

aggressive tone, hostility and fear that it portrayed. Phrases like: 'let's go and kidnap somebody' or 'how about sending someone to spy on them', 'Let's go and surround them', 'why have you come? To spy on you . . .' 'I think we should ignore them and get on with our own problems', 'shall we throw them out?' 'May be they want to find out if we are weak or strong. If we are silent they will get bored and go away'. 'Perhaps they are just studying us to give themselves something interesting to do', 'they are going to use us' 'they are getting bored', 'I am very suspicious of them', 'I want to know why you are here'.

At one point one group went to the kitchen and got some kitchen utensils and banged those over the heads of the other group, with great glee and excitement, thinking themselves incredibly funny and brave and provocative . . . On another occasion one woman decided to become a pacifist when she visited the other group and she told them so. It took the other group a long time to be convinced after which they became listless and disinterested, the energy that had activated them up to now, slowly petering out.

After reading their comments back to them they decided that they were, after all, a civilised group of men and women and not as hostile as they had made out, and they decided to do the whole exercise again but this time in a peaceful civilised way. Each group got together to discuss ways of doing this and slowly the temperature dropped further and further, they kept bring up phrases like: 'yes, that's very well, but we can't do that, remember, we are supposed to be peaceful now!' Eventually they decided, by sending ambassadors to and fro, to become two Red Indian tribes who could unite to repel the paleface invaders . . .

and that's how it was played out . . .

Compared with this exercise it seems relatively easy to establish an individual in a group, to see the growth of warmth and closeness between individuals, but much more difficult to establish relationships between groups, to find willingness of one group to become involved in the affairs of another, with clearly expressed tribal and territorial prerogatives, even among people arbitrarily and randomly chosen, strangers to each other only a few hours previously. If this can happen in a weekend seminar, amongst people who have only just met full of professed goodwill for each other, how would this apply to society itself? To community organisations, to statutory and voluntary groups, to communitées, ethnic groups, countries?

Before we can answer these questions, I feel, these feelings and energy-flows must come out into the open and be freely discussed and studied. And although group work and group therapy work has become quite fashionable in the last few years, inter-group work is still in its infancy and barely considered. Yet sociologically and community-wise it is far more important.

The Individual And His Own Body

We have previously mentioned that the attitude we may have towards our group and society may be closely linked with the emotional and conceptual image we have of ourselves. We have shown how Simeon's cortex and Freud's superego are in conflict with other instinctual and self-perceptual factors, and we now want to show how man's body responds and reacts to these influences, and what

bearing such response may have on the effective functioning of a community worker in the community.

The taboo about the body is such that this particular subject is very often laughed out of court or relegated to the less academically inclined. The body is not acceptable to intellectually trained debaters, and messages from the body are often ignored and pushed away. After all, a child is praised for his brilliant schoolwork and reasoning, rarely for his ability to feel deeply and even less if he or she gives vent to such feelings or wants to act in accord with them. Order and discipline in the classroom are important to the teacher rather than to the curious child, expressions of mirth or sorrow or anger are rarely encouraged. Yet when we talk about communities and community work we talk primarily about relationships. And when we deal with relationships we have to take into account how we feel about each other.

The body is an important part of our means of expression and non-verbal communication is an important part of the body's language.

Alexander Lowen writes (in *'The Betrayal of the Body'*) ' . . . the body is the repository and living expression of all experience of the individual. Working with the body facilitates recall or repressed memories and feelings'. He finds that muscle knots and tensions and pain in some areas of the body correspond to very specific past experiences and when these areas are massaged these experiences come flooding back in fantasy pictures or dreams which can be analysed. Professor Rothblatt (in a recent issue of *Medizinische Sonderausgabe*) goes even further and traces the history of several hundred slipped disc sufferers. He

attributes the onset of this affliction to suppressed childhood experiences. Statistically he proves the probability to be high that such early emotional experiences have been located in the muscle structure surrounding the spine. When certain muscles come under stress and tension for prolonged periods, many

of the individual vertebrae are impaired in their movement and this way go so far as to cause them to fuse altogether so that most movement is then assigned to few places where the fused segments pivot. These pivot points then have far more than the usual amount of wear and tear and so become liable to be ruptured by any sudden stress. The paper goes on to explain how the movement of the spine can be restored and that this treatment includes a good deal of recall of lost memory from the unconscious. Some of these memories relate to feelings of violence and rebellion against overprotection and against authority of any kind ('a stiff-necked character', 'a pain in the neck' are telling phrases).

So my first point is that a professional community worker who wants to intervene successfully in a social situation must be at ease with himself and his body. Before I can relate to other bodies I must be fairly secure in my own, must have some idea of my own identity, of my own worth in the society in which I live.

Josephine Klein attracts people to her groups who are lost, have little sense of their own identity, who have problems, either because they feel isolated from other men, or because they may be so in need to establish themselves that they become a nuisance to their fellows and are rejected and so again become isolated. Such people will often complain that nobody pays any attention to them,

nobody wants to know about them, nobody wants to listen. In a group situation they are unable to listen to anyone else, to take any interest in anyone else's problem, to be concerned. It is only very slowly and gradually that an awareness can grow that to become a more open person and to take an interest in others may be the best way to help themselves.

Many other facets are revealed in groups to members who take part in them and the manipulation of the hidden agenda is fast becoming the stock in trade of successful committee chairmen who have taken courses in group dynamics.

Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow explore the ideas that man is self directed and self activated and that this is the highest form of human existence. Their ideas of group therapy have been incorporated in many orthodox therapists' practices in the last few years even if they do not officially label themselves as followers of the existential or experiential line of psychology.

Abraham Maslow writes (in *'The Farther Reaches of Human Nature'*) : 'Real love is non-interference and non-demanding and can delight in the thing itself; therefore it can gaze at the object without guile, design or calculation. This makes for less abstraction, less atomising, less dissection . . . This means that all aspects are more apt to be given equal care and attention and that every part is apt to be delightful and wonderful; BE-love almost always guarantees this kind of distributed looking on with care, intensity and fascination. The Be-lover will more easily see the per se nature of the object itself, in its own right and its own style of being. A loved one lets himself be seen instead of hiding . . . '

Basically, all man wants from man or woman is what might justly be called a kind of admiration; that is an admission of his actuality, assuring him of his honour, his worth and his right in this world . . . *All*, I say! But how difficult this is to obtain!

We are still left with the internal conflict between the cortex and the diencephalon, the ego, the superego and the id, with the adjustment of man's biological heritage and his need to live in a modern urban society. In practice both Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls give a fair amount of direction to their groups and they are by no means entirely self-directed. A group left largely to itself can throw up a great deal of aggression and hostility followed by guilt and more hostility. This hostility and conflict can be used (manipulated?) in a role-play or psychodrama situation and can lead to greater awareness of our own feelings and relationships to each other. Or it can be left undirected and unused and can determine adversely all further learning experience.

The 'New Careers' project for ex-offenders which NACRO has been developing in the last few years makes use of these methods to channel the destructive energies of young men towards helping each other in a more constructive way. This basic principle of self-help, of self-organisation and self-awareness can be extended to social work clients who then cease to be clients for ever and may become helpers themselves, helping other clients. Many social workers welcome this approach and find it useful when dealing with problem families or other clients who may have lost their social skills of living in a highly complex society, by being for so long at the receiving end of help. Community self-help groups have been formed in Islington, for instance, where clients and

community helpers become inextricably uncatagorised. People out of work, in rent arrears or otherwise demoralised or lacking self confidence are asked to help others in youth clubs, coffee bars for young people or play schemes during the Summer months.

The New Careers scheme depends on an elaborate ritual of social sponsorship into occupations previously denied to this group of young offenders or potential delinquents. Turner provides a model of 'sponsored' social mobility as contrasted to 'contest' mobility. Young men from difficult homes may not want to enter the contest for jobs and promotion, recommendations and introductions may be unavailable to them. Their own concepts of themselves as not belonging to the society they see around them and forming their own subculture, similarly as the social work client, once so labelled, may be a client for ever, can be quite dramatically reversed; but what worries me personally is the easy talk about success rates, 40 per cent in the first year, 60 per cent in the second, 90 from the third year onwards, they said at a recent NACRO conference. Progress on the road to conformity? 'I like you better now because you are more like me . . .'

Conclusions

I am aware that I have badly skimped a great deal of material, trying to simplify the many different strands that make up individual and group behaviour.

I am aware that I may well be accused of tramping on ground that angels fear to tread and on rather thin ground at that. It may be said that my approach is unscientific and overenthusiastic, that my presumptuous cortex has jumped too many fences and to too many conclusions. All I can say in mitigation is that I believe that modern social psychology in trying to emulate the exact sciences has left itself with too few experiential tools that it may well use, and that this field is overpopulated with pusillaminous angels who dare not use their tender feet.

