

Richard Sutcliffe

LUNAR LIFE LIVES

[no matter what the colour]

A holiday playscheme can be an exhilarating experience - colourful, intense and so alive: more of a growth therapy for hedonists than a school! This is one adult's point of view and not a traditional way of describing a playscheme, but this is not an article about playschemes. I shall relate some experiences of running one particular playscheme because it may throw light on the race relations issue. This is not an article about race relations. This paper has not begun in a predictable manner and neither will it end as such. Be warned, its message lies not in its words or subject matter, but in your immediate reality, any reality.

The 'families association' to which the playscheme is responsible received a sizable grant last summer for 'harmonious race relations within the community', considered to be particularly good regarding its close proximity to the Southall riots: the committee of residents will not even apply for a grant this year; the picture has changed! The spring half-term holiday enjoyed perhaps the most dynamic of all the playschemes that have been held to date. Prior advertising of the week's programme produced a large turn-out on the first day and an attendance of 40+ (5 to 15 yrs.) was maintained for five intensive days. No time had to be spent building momentum. The continuity within five days of one week and a reliable staff, sufficient in number and skills to provide a flexible and varied programme, helped to maintain and at times heighten interest and support. The programme included a range of creative activities which culminated in the successful (perhaps not so beautiful) 'paint a wall' exercise. Alongside, more active games were maintained, inside and out, significantly broadening the range now familiar and accessible to this group of children. A talent show and fancy dress parade helped to encourage the support of mothers. The week ended with a tea party at which more than fifty children sat down to what turned out to be, thankfully, a reasonably ordered but fun event.

The Easter playscheme was very different. Split over two weeks, the first was staffed by only one leader. The problem of maintaining momentum was difficult at times. Only a minimum of planning and organisation was practicable, one person having to provide interest for all and any children that might appear while dealing with the inevitable flow of individual needs. Children can lose interest in activities frustratingly quickly when the sharing involvement of a leader is absent. It is not enough to be a floating intermittent presence. A playscheme comes close to a child-minding service under such circumstances and loses much of its vitality and value.

The second week commenced with a very quiet day. There was gossip of a racial dispute, sparked by an argument between two white mothers over the selection of children for the trip to London the previous week. It was blown up out of all proportion during the weekend. One mother whose two children are black had alleged racial prejudice. By Monday morning, white children were said to be boycotting the playscheme because of the supposed dominance of black children, but it transpired that very few, possibly only one, had actually made this decision. A few had been forbidden to attend by their parents, those centrally involved in the argument, but even so they soon found their way back. The initial absence of children was sad in many ways because two volunteers had arrived for the week. Gradually, life and energy were reinjected and climaxed with an almost celebratory game of rounders on a sunny Wednesday afternoon, a brief reprieve from the tension which was unmistakably present. Thirty-five children were directly involved in this game which lasted for three hours without any sign of flagging - a rare occasion on this estate.

However, it was becoming clear that the 'dispute' revolved around three families of children. Of these, some seemed to be clearly inspired by their parents (who by now were avoiding each other) and some who simply defended themselves against vivid verbal attack; and then there were the others, the majority, who just wanted to join in. It appeared sporadically in outbursts which were reflected at quieter moments by honest questions put to the leaders regarding the status of blacks in the playscheme; and then there were the tears of other children . . . It was a cloud that grew to completely mar the final day which was soon to produce abusive shouting from one side of the green to the other and back again, mirrored by equally vitriolic, if somewhat distanced, involvement of adults.

It is sad that personal conflict, initially in the mind of one person and subsequently successful in provoking one or two others (thus, a problem of a handful of relationships) can be allowed to infiltrate

a community and its playscheme to such an extent: it not only confuses the issue, but undoubtedly produces confused children, justifiably! To see it in any other way than this is surely to miss the point (I understand that this estate still perceives its disharmony as 'racial'). This 'problem' became far more important than the playscheme which was forced to operate under terms and in an atmosphere not suited. However, it is of more serious concern to a playleader when it is considered that once again the problem arose from the organisation of children's activities (the first time to be expressed as 'race') and was fuelled by emotions of and toward those most closely involved in this work. Paradoxically, the association and its work is achieving under such circumstances the very opposite of its expressed aim. Threatened resignations, aggressive coffee-table talk and a general atmosphere of unrest was the net result. It is clear that no genuine malice is felt by and between the children without due reason and reason rarely lasts for more than a day at a time. However, children love to fly flags, particularly adult flags. This parent personal dispute quickly became a 'racial' reality, the responsibility for which placed in the lap of the loudest spokesmen - the children. Parents may appear imaginative/gullible for want of a better word, but it would be a truer adult response to describe the children's condition as misled. As a playleader, it brings to mind the eastern idea of reality as illusion . . .

This story presents a wonderful study in community dynamics and the creation of a social reality; yet to know what to do about it is another matter entirely. Clearly, it is not the colour, the organisation or the activities that are determinant in themselves; just as age, sex, personality, income or intelligence, values or beliefs (ad infinitum) are, similarly, not the 'cause of conflict' in an absolute way where something must be established or changed in order to remove the 'problem'. A black person cannot and need not be changed into a white (and vice versa) in order to retrieve harmony. Always, it is the person that is the source of conflict (that which we perceive we are). Whatever 'cause of conflict' we select, no matter which slice of the cake we choose (and there are an infinite number, limited only by the sharpness of our mind), all these things are the distinction of the individual's mind. This is as relevant no matter who we are, what type of person or community we consider, or what form or means of expression is used. All definable circumstances of a 'problem' can be seen as arbitrary imaginings, individual and transient, which, rather than determinant, are the chosen outlet, the manifestation, of inner needs and emotions. **Indefinable** as these energies are, they force an expression. **So often, attention is focused on the non-determinant factors**, the manifestations, because they are 'understandable', because they are of the mind.

Community work is an opportunity to gain a detached view of the actual, rather than supposed, social dynamics of a modern environment. The 'actual' dynamics are expressed in terms of the '**individual in conflict**' and current topical issues and ideologies are seen as **fickle projections of the individual's mind**. No reality is accepted as 'actual' other than this. An approach whereby shared reality and 'knowledge' are placed subordinate to individual state of mind may help us develop a more mature understanding of 'social problems'; (and of life and death - this holds true as a total view of the world). It brings about a much more fundamental (but easily accessible) shift in perspective and a far simpler reality than our 'mind of conflict' would have us believe! However, the racial issue, for example, remains a potential projection of the individual's mind, prone to suggestibility as it is, and a probable social reality. Do we really **want** racial conflict? The answer is surely 'no', but sadly for most of us our mind is our master, our world is shaped in our mind.

The mind is a personal computer (not even a man): it has become a God. We believe in nothing greater than our own mind, and that which it creates. We limit ourselves greatly. The mind is useful because of its function of **breaking up reality**, distinguishing between this and that, you and me. Without this process, there would be nothing to think or know **about**. **But this is a process of the mind and is the source of our illusory conflict**. The universe is total (the whole cake) and infinite. It happens by itself and operates in harmony. It is only man-things that require 'thinking about'. We impose our own creations of thought upon the actual presence of the universe, **blindly disregarding its intrinsic harmony and totality**. We only see a system within a system; a system that is less than man, created by man, a microcosm of the macrocosm. If we limit ourselves to what we **know**, we limit ourselves to our mind. If we believe in the distinctions of mind and hold these beliefs as absolute, by definition we will only see conflict and paradox. Now think of the power we divest in such illustrious creations of the mind as science, industry, politics and religion. These things determine our social reality and as designers and builders we are responsible. Think in terms of our own personal reality, of our relationships particularly those closest, our parents and our children. Do our thoughts and actions in all these things, both personal and impersonal, mirror the harmony of the natural universe? If not, it is our own mind that has created the conflict. Do we **like** this world of distinction? Do we choose **all** that we create or do we disregard the 'other side of all things (be they actions, opinions, qualities, manifest needs and emotions or functions) as non-existent, insignificant or unfortunate? The dual nature of perceived reality is unavoidable and inevitable. You have to be cruel to be kind - literally! It makes

for ultimate harmony, **not of the mind but of the universe**. It is more than we can 'imagine', more than we can believe.

My hand can come to know all of its make-up, distinguishing between this finger and that, prefer it this way or that way because it encompasses these things; but it can only guess at the body, feel the blood flow to and from . . . from something whose function is determined by a greater reality. **The mind can deny the greater reality, the intrinsic harmony.**

See the decisions of the mind, of the conscious ego, our-pet computer (monkey pilot)! See the government and the demarcation of land; see the laws, values and beliefs of our country; and the attitudes of mind, the possessive loving and political killing; see the concrete: all these things we **choose**. We cannot and need not choose or control the workings of the universe - beyond, that is, one small item which is ourselves. What does the universe have to offer? Total Harmony. We may know our mind very well; but we forget of what we are a part. We forget to look to the universe for wisdom and guidance. We forget where to look.

*There's a certain something inside of us
That's a far wiser friend than imagining
Because it's already happening*

*Monkey Pilot
Midmay 82*

AHP NOTES

WANTED . . . people outside the London area, willing to act as AHP local contact persons. A little administration work in exchange for workshop places free. Contact M-O Daulton, Flat 58 21 Seymour Street London W1

MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP.

Next meeting will be at 5 PM Sunday September 26th. For details please phone 01 262 8193
