

## EDITORIAL

### THE COUNSELLING COURSE AT SOUTH WEST LONDON COLLEGE

Since joining the staff of this counselling course I have become aware of the extent to which central ideas on the course and in Humanistic Psychology coincide and in this issue I intend to show how these ideas are having a direct effect on hundreds of students each year and indirectly on a wide variety of organisations. Person-centred learning in a peer-directed learning community gives people an excitement in learning, a strong belief in themselves and a sense of their own power. I believe that the students who leave the course each year want to put these ideas into practice in a wider world. Some of them experience considerable success and are aware of making personal and professional changes of considerable importance.

The course has been running in one form or another since the early 1970s. It started originally in response to the need of a group of welfare officers in London colleges who realised that their increasing involvement in the more complex personal issues of their students required more skills than they themselves had at that time. An important energiser was Sheila Blaine who was then Student Welfare Officer at South West London College and in response to her request Bridgid Proctor was employed to offer counselling skills teaching. With the help and inspiration of Gaie Houston, John Heron, Tom Osborn and others an ideology emerged with Self-directed Learning and Peer and Self Assessment as its central features. The requirements and implications of these ideas are still being worked out by generations of staff and students on the course. Credit should also be given to the college authorities, who while providing a firm structure, have responded in a flexible way to the creativity that has flourished over the years. The course has expanded from being a short evening course to one which is available on a part-time day release basis to which many students are seconded by their employers. It attracts Y.T.S. workers, nurses, doctors, college and university lecturers, youth workers, residential and field social workers, student services officers and others.

The course is distinctive in that it runs as a peer-directed learning community. Together at a residential planning weekend, staff and students start to determine each year's programme. Needs and resources are matched and students often elect to run some workshops. It is intended that self and peer monitoring should be an integral part of every workshop and when working towards assessment in the final years, students draw up individual and community learning contracts and assess their own and each others skills in the light of these.

There are five full-time members of staff and eleven part-time posts. Because the part-time staff are practising counsellors and therapists in different fields they are a considerable source of energy and ideas as well as expertise. Sadly some of these part-time posts are now under review. There is no doubt that the course will be impoverished if they are allowed to go.

The articles in this issue are mainly by part-time staff and students. The first by Madelyn Brewer is written from the interesting position of a staff member who was once a student. Her article looks at some of the difficulties inherent in the idea of self-directed learning and highlights the real challenge of the course which is about allowing yourself to be fully present in order to find your own direction in your own time. The task is not so much to find a useful set of skills for helping others but to discover and use the counsellor and client in each of us. The myth of the kind counsellor who exists only to bring succour and understanding to others is helpfully exploded. Two articles are by students. The first by Jane Read explores her thoughts and feelings as she looks back over her three years and now faces up to assessment and Diploma awarding. David Willow, another student from the same year, describes the serendipitous nature of the learning process, the value of having time to try out new structures of working and living and above all the opportunity to look at process as well as content.

Tom Osborn who worked on the course several years ago and returned recently for a few months has contributed two articles. The first, which was published in this Journal in June 1979, looks mainly at the Planning Weekend as an example of the use of precise structures to facilitate self directed learning. He describes the form of the weekend, making the point that the work that goes on here cannot be left behind and forgotten after Sunday afternoon. It is rather the labour that precedes the birth of a learning community which goes on defining its unique ways of learning and being. Tom's second article moves to the question of peer assessment. He looks at two

kinds of judging monitoring and assessment, particularly peer assessment and asks how this community should act when it reaches this boundary with the outside world. Robin Shoheit's article also looks at the obstacles to self-directed learning when it is operating alongside other systems, and examines the obstacles within staff and students and within the model itself.

It is not possible to be around this community for long without being aware of its shadow side. There is much joy, love and co-operation but the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, dependence/independence, separation and intimacy also engender pain. This is hard to acknowledge but Kenneth Gray's article on jealousy and envy shows that it can be done. His article is also an example of a good way to plan a workshop and in addition raises some tantalising speculations regarding blocks in the staff group and the ways in which these may be reflected in the whole community.

The article by David Smith explores his particular interests in therapy and this has considerable impact on some students on the course.

My own highly subjective account of my experiences as a prospective and new staff member represents an attempt to integrate some powerful experience as I have tried to come to my own understandings of the role of a staff member on a peer directed course.

We devoted this particular issue to the counselling course at the South West London College because we knew of its emphasis on negotiated learning. We are also very interested to hear of the experiences of staff and students on other course in the humanistic field.

Mary Charleton

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