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# Accreditation of Skills by Peers in Training

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by

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Accreditation to practice one of the 'ancient professions' such as medicine and law is enshrined in law. A semi-anonymous board, making decisions in secret and using 'marks' based on written work done in an exam room, is the official accrediting body. Sometimes they consider 'marks' based on practical work or an oral examination. Many other professions have adopted the same model. A successful period as a junior practitioner is then required, usually, for the individual to be awarded a 'qualification'.

In my opinion the official model is not without some merit. The aim of guaranteeing to potential clients that a lawyer or doctor has satisfied a team of skilled practitioners that they have shown appropriate skills in an examination is a good one. It does not, of course, guarantee good work with any particular client who might come along and it does not give the practitioner themselves a basis of self-evaluation on which to grow. But it does mean that, on the basis of probability they know something useful. Or, at least, they did once.

Most people working in professions which involve helping clients with personal issues of health and social well-being seem to be concerned

about what they should be doing and how to do it. Much time, especially at the beginning of a career in, say, nursing or social work, is given to informal chats with colleagues and friends, airing anxieties, asking for approval, pondering improvement.

I would like to see structured methods tried out to assist professionals in assessing their performance in helping clients. One of these methods is accreditation by peers on a training programme. It is often recognized that the best judge of a student's ability is other students. Harnessing this type of evaluation can be useful. The processes involved in doing it are the same as for peer and self assessment. Indeed, accreditation to practice certain stated skills is an important part of overall assessment of an individual. (The papers contained in the Self Directed Learning issue of **Self and Society**, VolXII No.4, July/Aug 1984 are very relevant.)

The aim of peer and self accreditation is to help individuals identify skills which they can use with confidence and those which they need to be wary of and to work on and, of course, those which they should not use at all until they have

had more training. The informed and honest views of peers on a training course can be useful in this respect.

Based on my own experience as a student on an IDHP diploma course (Facilitator styles course), and on the discussions I have had with people on other courses which use peer accreditation, I have identified a number of issues which seem relevant. I am not suggesting a list of rules. No two courses are the same and one course might choose to resolve an issue one way whereas another course might be better off resolving it differently. A set of themes, which are often important seems to contain the following:

### **When to begin?**

One choice is to leave it until the end. (A lot of people seem to assume this is the only option). Another option is to do it at intervals, each term or at the half way point as well as at the end. The advantage of leaving it all to the end are that people can get on with other things meanwhile; the disadvantage is a high anxiety level at the end of the course. (Personally I would prefer, as a general rule, to do it at intervals, starting off with very gentle exercises, as with other aspects of peer and self assessment).

### **Are course teachers accredited too?**

Again this issue should be decided by the group, and a decision has to be made about whether the course facilitators/teachers/staff are being accredited as if they were students, or are they being accredited with the skills associated

with their role in the group. This has an important bearing on what a peer is. Issues can come up about the perceptions of differences in skills. 'Peer' in one sense means, 'with equal skills'. In another sense it means 'with equal power'. Going into these aspects can be helpful.

### **Who shall facilitate accreditation sessions?**

One of the issues here is whether or not to use a facilitator outside the group. Someone who is experienced in humanistic psychology and who may have run a workshop for the group could play a useful part. Or the group might feel competent to do it on their own. On the other hand having an outsider who carries some weight with humanistic psychologists might give some validity to the decisions. It can also act as a check on unconflicted scapegoating, collusions and dumping that might be going on unconsciously.

### **Place of the accreditation in life-planning.**

The issue here, for each person on a course, is how the accreditation links with their fears, hopes and plans about the future. There may also be issues about what a person has done in the past and whether they were then competent to do it..

In a sense the issue is what each individual wants to use the accreditation for: kudos, confirmation of ability, justifying using it with other people, earning cash with it, and so on. The group would have to decide on how to get at this. A workshop on future life planning would seem to be the least that is

required. Several sessions, some focusing on the relevance of the accreditation to future plans might be better;

### **Jealousy.**

This is closely related to the last issue. If I am jealous of someone else's success or of their likely success, then my distress is likely to inhibit the clarity and integrity of my assessment. The emphasis on cooperation in humanistic psychology is, to me, a fine corrective to the overemphasis on competition that I find elsewhere. Yet it sometimes masks covert competitiveness in group work. Kenneth Gray's (1984) description of a workshop on envy and jealousy might make a useful contribution for a group to consider.

### **Structure of the exercise.**

The decisions a group takes about the issue are the same for all peer and self assessment. They involve things such as: Break up into small groups or work in the big group. (Or work in small groups first and then in a big group.) What preparation should be carried out by each member of the group and should it be done in group time or 'at home'? Should there be a list of skills agreed on from which everyone selects their accreditation, or should each person produce their own? How should evidence be presented? Reference to happenings in the group are one thing. Testimony and

evidence about performance outside the group might be considered very relevant. How to get it? And how to use it?

### **Unfinished business.**

If all, or an important part of, accreditation is done at the end of a course, then it might be useful, ahead of time, to schedule it so that it doesn't tangle with other things which are likely to be going on, unfinished business, saying goodbye and celebrating. The group needs to decide how it wants to handle all these things so that what needs to be done is done without snarling up the other things which are competing for space at the end of a course.

I doubt if what I have written has covered all or even most of the themes and issues in accreditation which it would be useful for any particular group to look at. I hope I have drawn attention to some of them and hope that a flexible view will continue to develop in the human potential movement, allowing for ever more useful and effective accreditation, not only for humanistic psychologists, but for all professionals. Perhaps it may even combine with old fashioned 'exams' in some cases.

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### **Reference**

Kenneth Gray (1984) Envy and jealousy in a community. **Self and Society**. Vol. XII No.4 July/Aug. p210-213