

# DELIGHTS AND DIFFICULTIES OF A FACILITATOR STYLES COURSE

by Jill Anderson

It was suggested by a friend that the next thing to do was the Facilitator Styles Course. At the time I was a social worker with 10 years experience and I was realising with horror that even though I liked this job I needed 'diversions' to supply the energy to do it.

I had an interview with James Kilty, who was due to facilitate the next course at Surrey University. We talked about the way that I worked and the things that I enjoyed and I even managed to explain my fear of doing my job the easy way 'i.e. as if I didn't care'. He seemed to understand what I meant and said that I could have a place if I wanted it.

Sixteen of us started and from the beginning I was surprised that people said a lot about how they were feeling and one person objected to so many things that she talked herself off the course within a few days. I was astounded that anyone would do such a thing because although I was scared of what might happen next I did feel that this course held a lot of potential for new energy and I felt very glad to be there. I also wondered at the same time if I had talked myself on to a course that I was perhaps not experienced enough for, as some of the participants seemed to talk a language that I did not know. Later as I became more and more familiar with the culture I began to reckon my courage to jump into such an enterprise.

The Facilitator Styles course at Surrey University carries a Diploma in Humanistic Psychology and then consisted of 60 days a year for two years - one day a week and one weekend a month for approximately nine months. I had to do some negotiation with my full-time job to make the time available, as well as to try and explain to my husband why it was of such importance to me when I couldn't really explain my determination to myself. Perhaps I intuitively knew this course was going to be important for me but at that time I did not know or value my intuition.

## Topics and Distress

The first year was facilitated primarily by James Kilty and also by John Heron and Nick Ragg from the University and visiting week-end facilitators for the nine week-ends. The subjects for these week-ends included co-counselling, Bioenergetics, Creative Dance, Regression and Integration, Encounter, Six Category Intervention Analysis, Psychodrama, Gestalt, and Co-counselling Teacher Training.

At the beginning there was a lot of input about archaic distress from John Heron and I wondered why nobody had ever told me about this before when it all made such a lot of sense to me. I wondered if my difficulties regarding energy for my job were due to my personal distress - obvious now but a very new concept for me then and one never mentioned in all my social work training.

The first year of the 2 year course emphasised input and experiential work on the four strands of the course, - Personal Growth, Interpersonal work, Facilitator Training and Social Change - words that sounded fine but that I hardly understood until the end of that first year.

On reflection it seemed that the first year was all about getting enough personal growth work done individually, to be clear enough to be able to work together to manage the 2nd year ourselves. i.e. in a peer fashion, with James, the primary facilitator, available to make suggestions. At the same time he became a member of the group on a more equal basis than was possible when he was acting from an hierarchical place and carrying the weight of the forming, norming, and storming of the group in the first year.

### **Distress in the way**

Some people decided along the way that the course was not for them and left but I never considered such an action even on the day when my personal distress got in the way of continued participation and I found myself outside the room where the course was being held. I don't remember making the decision to go only that the darkness that seemed to be enveloping me was too frightening to stay with. I allowed myself to be taken back and I sat on the wide window sill, still very frightened but somehow knowing that I could explore this fear and, if I could endeavour to keep a balance of attention, I could be intelligent through the feelings. James facilitated my 'personal work' and gave me explanations that he said I didn't have to accept. I didn't accept them, privately thinking that his explanation was too outlandish but of course he was 'spot on' and he had skilfully given me permission not to have to accept an explanation for what I was experiencing at a time when I was likely to resist it.

Interestingly I have since especially concentrated on developing my skills in the specific area that he was outlining, i.e. Regression and Integration, and find it an immensely important theme in humanistic work.

### **Enjoying the Fruits**

The second year of the course was organised by the group, or rather, as many of the group who had energy for it. I was one of them because after a lot of personal work, I was beginning to realise that I could put my abilities to suggest and negotiate into action. Yes, it did take a long time to make group decisions but with practice we got better at it, and consequently enjoyed the power that we had to determine our own 2nd year and obtain for ourselves the experiences that we felt would help to complete our knowledge for the Diploma

The second year brought rich rewards for me as I developed my skills as a facilitator and tackled my deeper patterns of personal distress to further free myself from their restrictive hold. I learned to appreciate my abilities rather than feel that I had no right to always be searching. The final Self and Peer Assessment and Accreditation was very exacting and also rewarding - to choose to assess my own abilities

and accredit myself to work in specific areas of Humanistic Psychology and then to hear my peers' opinion of my claims made the original assessment a very important piece of writing. We also needed to have worked through the basic barriers that might have prevented us from being able to give clear feedback. I think that we achieved both these goals.

## **USING THE MEDICINE WHEEL TRADITION ON AN IDHP DIPLOMA COURSE**

**by Annie Spencer**

Developing group facilitation skills - what a difficult area this is. Good group facilitation is quite idiosyncratic and a role to which we bring personality and charisma as well as acquired skills.

We can attend training groups to learn about group dynamics and to learn through experience what it is like to be facilitated in various ways. We can study John Heron's six categories of facilitator skills. Then, if we are lucky, we may have a chance or two of assisting a more experienced leader while they run their group in their way. After this it is rare to get the freedom to explore new areas in depth with an ongoing group. Where is the space in which we can explore with safety and develop styles and different areas of work?

I think the IDHP offer an opportunity for group leaders to do just these things. It has devised course structures that manage to combine the safety of a constant container with enough fluidity for it to be alive and open to development. In the two year IDHP diploma course, the course contract presents a format that ensures that a core of basic modalities in Humanistic Psychology is covered by visiting weekend facilitators. This frees the primary facilitators to choose a particular modality on which to focus. Previous IDHP courses have been led with primary modalities such as: co-counselling and T-group training, eclectic with an emphasis on open encounter, the transpersonal, body and transpersonal approaches, cocounselling, primal regression, creative groupwork, collaborative enquiringism.

Peter Reason and I, having run four 2 year IDHP courses between us, took the opportunity to explore new ground with our recent group. While adhering to the basic structure of an IDHP course, we chose to focus on Reichian bodywork and the Medicine Wheel teaching of the Native Americans for specific teaching input. These are areas in which we are both working, and we decided to explore how well these two modalities might work together.

**Our aims included:**

- Exploring the meeting place of psychology and spirituality with the mapping available from these two disciplines.