

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Conference on Accreditation at the Cambridge Graduate Centre

September 27th 1991

by Jill Hall

Two years ago the Norwich Collective offered a training course in the dynamics of group process. Almost immediately the subject of accreditation surfaced, revealing an enormous amount of complex and powerful personal material. (See article by Richard House and myself in March '91 issue of *Self and Society*.) Confident that the dynamics that emerged in our training group had a wider significance, we decided, with trepidation but also with excitement, to organise a national conference on accreditation. And so, on 27th September, about eighty-five people gathered together at the Graduate Centre in Cambridge to discover, explore and share some of their responses to the important challenges presented by this subject.

As Angela Cameron, the chairperson, stated at the start of the day, the aim of the conference was for us each to expand our awareness - we were not attempting at this stage to put forward 'answers'. We hoped that at least we could look at the polarisation of positions that we anticipated was likely to occur, rather than bemoan, ignore, or flee from this uncomfortable phenomenon. My particular task, along with Peter Harmsworth, was to overview the process of the entire proceedings.

After this brief introduction the floor was cleared of chairs. Two speakers, both founder members of the Norwich Collective, took up positions at either end of the room. Brian Thorne presented a clear, strong and considered case for accreditation whereas Steve Dowson explored the dangers entailed in establishing such procedures, developing a theme around the notion of citizens keeping their own power to determine what best facilitates their emotional well-being rather than giving it over to the experts. Participants in the conference were invited to move towards or away from the speakers in response to the points they each raised. It seemed that many people had some surprises - about their own, as well as others', positions and mobility. It was generally agreed that this structure helped people to engage fully with the issues right from the beginning.

Conference members then divided into five smaller groups and went into separate rooms. Each group was co-facilitated by a woman and a man. Accreditation simulations were enacted - every group starting off by using the same set criteria for accreditation, with a panel considering an application from an accredee. After this simulation participants were invited to devise different methods of accreditation in the light of what they

had experienced. They were also asked to nominate two delegates to present their discoveries to the plenary session that followed. These delegates formed a 'fishbowl' in the middle of the room and the discussion that arose had the quality of real dialogue - not mere reporting. Many people said that they found unexpected feelings emerging; some were upset, some confused, others felt much had been clarified and that valuable new insights had been thrown up. Sharing was then opened out to include all conference members. It was noted that the main energy and focus had revolved around the interactions of the panel and that the accredittee tended to be lost and overlooked and unimportant. There was general agreement that face-to-face interaction with the accredittee was essential and that the presence of an outside observer of the whole accreditation process was desirable. Also, because attempts to safeguard standards seemed to promote a tendency towards greater rigidity, some people felt that positive steps should be taken to promote flexibility.

David Wasdell's socio-drama

After lunch (which was served in a restaurant on the premises so that our energy was not dispersed and we had the opportunity to exchange views and experiences) we returned for another plenary - a socio-drama devised by David Wasdell and directed by David Burton. As the socio-drama unfolded, the 'society' - divided into professionals, administrators and those seeking help - ended up preoccupied with negotiations, regulations and check-

ing procedures, and less and less real contact or nourishing exchanges were in evidence. Tight groupings emerged - exclusive inward-facing circles banding together to cope with the increasingly complex situation or to work out how to defeat the 'other lot'. Most of the money (counters were used) ended up with the Board of Commissioners, the trainers and the supervisors. Many individual professionals were out of work and market gardening was suggested as an alternative! Some of those 'seeking help' became so alienated that they dropped out of the socio-drama completely.

Tremendous energy was generated and a lot of laughter, but the socio-drama touched difficult areas for many people. Having found that we tapped very challenging material in our original training group when trying out this structure in preparation for the conference, we had decided that it might be helpful to gather into groups of three or four straight after the exercise in order to share and work through personal issues before switching the focus back to the implications for accreditation. It was interesting to note that the only lull in the whole day occurred at this point. Could, perhaps, this lowering of energy be an indication of our reluctance to address the ambivalence that the subject of accreditation stirs in us? After tea, when we returned for a further plenary session, people seemed bursting to talk once more; discussion was animated - never a pause - and a diversity of views was put forward.

UK in a unique position in the EC

The *principle of equivalence* was brought up: if an applicant did not fulfil the established criteria in some way then an equivalent experience or training could be offered for consideration. David Jones drew attention to the existence of the Common Law - which states that anyone can give a service, for payment, provided that both parties agree to the arrangement - and expressed how vital he felt it was that it be preserved. It gives us, in Britain, a unique position within Europe which we would do well to use creatively and responsibly.

Two strands emerged amidst the rich variety of responses: those who believed that accreditation was inevitable and, therefore, that urgent work was needed in order to evolve fitting procedures in keeping with humanistic principles; and those who were uneasy about the whole move towards the professionalisation of psychotherapy and counselling and were questioning the viability and value of accreditation itself. The allotted time of two hours sped by, and as seven o'clock approached many seemed almost desperate to 'get something

fixed'. Nearly everyone appeared keen to go forward and do more. Perhaps it was in order to combat the fear that our energy would scatter as the conference disbanded that the move to produce answers intensified. This need was, possibly, heightened by a much appreciated contribution from Courtenay Young who said that if people were to devise clear and definite proposals then UKSCP would be willing to consider them.

I wish that I had thought to add that another way to ensure that the energy sparked by our meeting together does not disperse, is a commitment to gather again - commitment to hold that open space and allow more to emerge and develop. Things don't necessarily have to gel in order not to be lost. The alternative to letting energy die, or waste, need not be to give it a set shape or form; another possibility is to re-create opportunities for its further expression.

Details on further conferences from Felicity Cox, Old Hall Farm, Burgh-next-Aylsham, Norfolk NR11 6NL Tel 0603 733 854

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