



The Institute for Development of Human Potential

This year sees the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first Institute for the Development of Human Potential Diploma Course. It changed many lives, and became a flagship of the humanistic movement in Britain. We look at the history, the theory and the experience.



THE IDHP DIPLOMA: 25 years of pioneering

Vicky Kidd

The Institute for the Development of Human Potential (IDHP) was established in 1976 by David Blagden Marks, John Heron, Tom Feldberg, Frank Lake and Kate Hopkinson. The course has survived for 25 years, essentially unchanged. It anticipated many of the shifts in thinking about organisational culture, that have had a profound influence on our thinking about the use and abuse of power and the nature of authority.

In this special edition of Self and Society we hear from facilitators past and present as well as current and past students. I hope it gives a flavour of this unique diploma.

John Heron was and is something of a visionary, and his writings have developed the key themes of the IDHP ethos. He pioneered the shift from the functional role of teacher and leader as the active supplier of knowledge to a passive group of students, to that of facilitator.

The facilitator is able to exercise power in hierarchical mode and also able to relinquish it, to encourage cooperation and support the autonomy of the group as it matures. This involves a radical shift in thinking about the role of teachers and leaders from functional: suppliers of desirable goods, knowledge or recognition, to relational: leaders who derive their authority from personal attributes and the nature of their relationships.

John Heron's thinking about the need to move from hierarchy towards cooperation and autonomy as models for healthy group functioning, anticipated and predated the shift in attitudes so widely reflected in new business structures today. As a result

the IDHP courses have always attracted students from organisational work.

The emphasis on the development of authenticity as the basis and well spring of relational leadership also attracts students from caring professions and those seeking personal as well as professional development. A significant number of F styles graduates follow a path into humanistic psychotherapy and group-work of all kinds.

Hierarchy to Cooperation

The link to business and organisational concerns is not surprising. The course models the obstacles individuals and groups face within organisations in achieving an authentic shift from hierarchy to cooperation as the management mode. Any graduate is therefore likely to operate successfully in an environment that values flexibility in the way leadership is offered.

The challenges faced by students on the course mirror the obstacles John Heron's ideas have faced in gaining their current degree of acceptance within modern thinking about organisations.

Building a Learning Community

The course starts in hierarchical mode. Cooperation can only work for groups and teams when sufficient safety and familiarity has been established, and the group has formed. The authentic conscious assumption of hierarchical authority remains the safest mode of facilitation while the group forms.

The first challenge for the group is to face the anxieties and difficulties of building a community that operates by different rules. Just as letting go of the certainties of the 'command and control' model of leadership is an issue for individuals and groups in business and elsewhere.

The group has to find its own way of working; its own individual set of answers about how space, time and power are to be shared out and how decisions will be arrived at: by consensus, majority, vocal minority (to name only three of the range of possibilities available!) This is a painful process. It eats time and generates anxiety for facilitators and participants alike. It is all too easy in this often seemingly endless process, to lose faith in the ability of the group to manage the transition effectively.

However unless the group from the earliest stages manages and therefore owns its process, the scope for establishing a flat decision making structure is lost. From the start of the course members of the group are involved in the decision making. By the second year the aim is to build the

group into a peer learning community in which all decisions are made by the group.

Another key developer of the ethos is Mike Eales. Mike has been involved in some way, as guest or primary facilitator, with every diploma course since he completed his own in 1982-4 and has been a primary facilitator of four two-year diplomas.

Leadership, Followership, and Trust

'The course has always involved an exploration of power,' says Mike Eales 'Members of the course spend two years seeing how groups are influenced; what works and what doesn't work: the sources of personal power'. It is still relevant today because people have the opportunity to learn so much about leadership *and* membership or followership.

Above all students learn to make the internal shift that allows the individual to work with a group by relinquishing power, letting it go. The task of letting go faces individuals with different problems depending on their own personal history and experience of power and hierarchy at family level, and in education, as well as in their working life.

Individuals often face fears of anarchy as well as personal humiliation if the more conventional role of the leader, and rules for allocation of power are let go. So members again address consciously a task that all managers and leaders must face in working with flatter management structures and project and matrix management if they wish to liberate the full creative potential of their teams.

Living through the group process as these issues are unravelled offers a personal development intensive. Primary and external facilitators provide expert input, however early on participants start to share the facilitation of the group. Members of the group learn from feedback how their most familiar styles affect others, they also have an opportunity to experiment with different approaches. The participants develop and deepen their understanding of the circumstances in which each of John Heron's three modes of facilitation: hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy are appropriate or desirable.

Authenticity and Relational Authority

In making these shifts group members also have to find their own authentic authority, without the benefit of the 'reference power' of role or place in the hierarchy. They need to find a space from which they can lead, not command. For some it is an equal challenge to find a comfortable space from which they can support others in their own exploration, or share power as a member of the group. A considerable amount of group open process time is available to allow people the chance to experience and reflect on their own, and others' ways of taking the positions of leader and follower.

When stripped of role or reference power the sources of personal power are inevitably tied up with issues of personal identity, and authenticity. The course acts as a greenhouse for the growth of communication skills and exploration of self.

In order to work effectively as consultants and business facilitators, members also have to learn to address what Mike

Eales calls the 'rule of three'. This requires an understanding of the simultaneous interrelationships of personal and group processes with the culture and norms of the organisation: the explicit and the informal rules that determine how things are done.

There is a strong focus on group dynamics: the often unconscious, issues and roles that underlie the way groups operate. This gives diploma graduates the skills to work with groups at the organisational level.

Mike talks of working within a family run firm where oil paintings of the successive chief executives and chairmen hang in the boardroom. These ghostly presences still dominated the company culture. Only when the pictures were turned to the wall, and subsequently shifted from the boardroom, could the current management gain the space and freedom to make important changes. This is an extreme example of the power of the culture, the way in which informal, implicit rules and relationships can shape an organisation.

Still Pioneering

The IDHP retains its pioneering traditions in its adherence to experiential learning. While the group uses models and theoretical reflection to make sense of what has happened, and is happening at the individual, and group level, the essential medium of learning is the experience of the group.

The IDHP has resisted approaches to convert the course into a post-graduate academic qualification in order to preserve the experiential heart of the course and its emphasis on self and peer assessment as the sole basis for assessment. The use of self and peer assessment is important not just as a prerequisite for a peer learning

community; but also because of the capability it builds in students' to assess their own performance accurately; that in turn generates and builds confidence and authentic internal authority.

The diploma builds emotional competence. It also remains at 'the learning edge' in its emphasis on spiritual intelligence: the ability to operate comfortably at the level of values and meaning; to hold and value group and individual silence as well as intense group and individual activity.

In preparing this article I talked to a cross-section of past participants who reflected the eclectic mix of experience and motivation of diploma students. All had approached the course looking for a mixture of personal and professional development.

Experiences of the Course

The experience of the course had profound affects on the way they operated at work, attributable in every case as much to the personal development component of the course as to the professional aspects. Individuals picked out different aspects of the course that had had the most profound impact on them personally, but all referred to the issue of confidence.

Trevor Sharman works in a senior role in a national voluntary organisation. He talked of his 'greater self confidence and ability to deal with issues, which previously I had found stressful and difficult'. Helen Askey was a manager for Pearl Assurance when she took the diploma. The course 'gave me the confidence to believe in my own abilities and to set up in business for myself'. Christina Bachini was a youth worker who has subsequently built an extensive business in facilitation and executive development. For her the course 'set me

up with a frame of reference that allows me to be confident that I can deal with any emotion and stay centred'.

The root of the confidence the course gives to participants lies in the challenges people face from their peers during the two years of the course: 'It can be very challenging personally, but will help you in all aspects of life and relationships' (Helen Askey). That sense of the course as a process that affects much more than work was echoed on Trevor Sharman's comment 'It is the best thing I have done so far in my life. The experiences it helped provide have enhanced the qualities of my life enormously.' For Steve Soul, a change manager with Yorkshire Water the diploma was 'an inward bound course. I became more holistic; more aware of my spirituality and creativity.'

Mike Eales explains the longevity and the success of the Diploma in simple terms: 'it's unique: it is the only long-term course I know of that works on the bridge between personal and professional development. It offers transformation of being as well as transformation of doing. There are lots of courses that offer professional development or personal development, I haven't heard of any other courses that offer both. Since maybe 60% of any organisational success depends on relationship, it makes a lot of sense to value a course that gives such an intense experience of the processes of trust-building and relating'

Vicky Kidd was a student on the 1991-3 IDHP diploma. She went on to train as a body centred psychotherapist at Chiron and is UKCP registered. She currently works as a trainer and executive coach as well as running a private psychotherapy practise. She will be co-facilitating the IDHP diploma course starting in September 2001.