

Maggie Smith

"I thought There would be Lectures"

Experiential Learning on Training Courses at Work.

Caring for the Elderly - Interviewing Skills - Counselling for Terminal Illness - Bereavement - Study Supervision - Inter-personal Skills for Managers - Mid-career Development. As a member of the Staff Development Section of a Social Services Department, and more recently as an independent consultant, I have designed and worked on courses with these and similar titles. Participants have included residential and day care staff; home help; prison officers; nurses; bankers; housing and environmental health officers; engineers; teachers; C.A.B. workers. Many of these would not recognise the phrase "humanistic psychology", or would recoil in horror at the thought that they might be exposed to it.

The constant factors in all these courses are the objectives and the methods, with theories from Maslow and Carl Rogers providing the basic framework. be loosely summarised as "enabling participants to respond more fully in their awareness of their strengths and ability to change both themselves and their needs, and as trainer I offer skills and resources to meet those needs - which with bereaved families; knowing where/when to stop or refer elsewhere. The design of the course - often through consultation with those who may participate, always with their seniors - will probably take into account skills which should be learnt, but it is far more valuable that participants have stated significant learning is greater when students choose, from a variety of options and resources, what they need and want to know". (Carl Rogers "On Personal Power"). My own training and experience as a counsellor have been invaluable; course design has been simplified by listening to Centre Managers, personnel officers, senior nursing staff, etc., reflecting back to them their own uncertainties for Course members has improved significantly through such consultation, and offering new approaches to learning is rewarding for all of us.

I intend to write about the use of fantasy with staff from many different backgrounds, and have then chosen examples of work with groups who may seem atypical of those we normally associate with experiential learning, with comments from evaluation sessions which demonstrate the value of new approaches.

Use of Fantasy

Suggesting to a group of social workers and Intermediate Treatment officers in a workshop on "Adolescent Sexuality" that they close their eyes and take themselves back to the Summer they took their "O" levels and recall what was most important for them produced a flip-chart remarkably similar to that expressing their concerns for the adolescents they worked with - no denying this evidence! The group was amused and surprised, and later responded warmly. to a longer guided fantasy about particular clients. They had discussed their fears about 'tampering with the unconscious' - and their privacy - and the simple first exercise had reassured them.

People need time to respond, and I respect their reluctance to lie on the floor - particularly if they are working colleagues and the course is a short one; strangers seem to find it easier to risk "making fools of themselves" although it is difficult to generalize and the most unlikely participants will seize the opportunity to play! Fantasy is a difficult word for some to accept, and emphasizing that it need be nothing more than a guided daydream; that there is no compulsion to reveal everything that happened - and that nothing **will** happen unless they choose - adds to safety and often encourages more openness.

As part of an exercise in self-awareness I suggest looking at behaviour patterns; the fantasy consists of a brief test - for instance, finding and crossing a stretch of water and deciding what to do next. The group then share in threes (speaker, listener, observer) how they chose the water; how (and if) they crossed it; what they did on arrival; how (or if) they returned. The listener suggests ways in which the trip parallels real life behaviour, and the observer notes down the patterns. The range of experiences is exciting and highly creative. People go to favourite and familiar rivers; to raging torrents or tropical islands; they build bridges, swim channels, row gently over - or spend so long deciding on a stretch of water they never actually cross it - and the parallel to their behaviour pattern is always accurate. One Senior Nursing Tutor went home and tried the exercise with his wife and eight-year-old son, and was delighted with their responses.

"No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge". (Khalil Gibran, "The Prophet").

Care Assistants/Home Helps. (Comments apply only to one Borough).

Usually female, unskilled, classed as "manual workers", often with high job satisfaction but low self-esteem, they were offered a basic two-week in-service training course, with lectures and films on hygiene, medical conditions of ageing; nutrition and safety at work, and demonstrations of lifting and first aid. Valuable and essential input, but there was little opportunity to share their feelings about their clients or their job, and I incorporated sessions on "My first week at work"; grief and bereavement; art therapy; communication and "Returning to work".

The first and last offered an opportunity to talk about their working relationships, the difficulties, rewards, dependency of and by their clients. (I was able to follow-up the suggestion of one group of Home Help and held a seminar for supervisors. Using co-counselling techniques of shared listening, the Supervisors shared the constraints of their own work and devised a method of being more supportive by seeing the Home Help more regularly, and listening to their views). The grief and bereavement session enabled them to look at their own grief and shock (one girl of 24 had four deaths in her first three weeks, and no-one said more than "Never mind, it's to be expected here, love" - and at grief in their own lives. Although I specialised in bereavement work at one time, I was astonished by the high proportion of "ordinary" people with unresolved grief - on every course I worked on, at least one member had a previously unshared traumatic loss - of a child, a parent, a spouse, some up to ten years before. The value of expressing tears and anger appeared regularly in evaluation comment - often in the form "I feel better now!" Communication - how do we talk to the elderly and handicapped? A series of exercises to show the difficulties of listening, followed by five minutes' sharing with silent attention, in pairs, about "loneliness". Originally this session was late in the course, but after comments like "I feel we know each other better now, I wish we'd done it earlier", I moved it forward. Art therapy had been requested by Centre Managers and some prospective course members at Centres for the Disabled - a lecture by one of the therapists in the Borough. Fortunately we had shared values and ideas, and she asked me to provide paper and paints! Great embarrassment and resistance to picking up a brush and to painting, but we eventually tried (I joined in the first time), using our left hand, our right hand and our teeth. After ten minutes groups

of four were painting a "Group Doodle", and the atmosphere was very different - they were reluctant to finish! Using a flower as a basis they painted an individual picture and talked about it to the group - These evaluating comments are self-explanatory.

"I felt awful when we were asked to paint - couldn't see the point. Now I know how the Residents feel when we get them to do things they don't want. I'll talk to them differently now . . . "

"I know now why they won't show us if they think it's rubbish!"

"I took mine home to show the kids - it's on the wall!"

"It was fun - now I know how daft members feel when they start".

Comments From Course Evaluation:

"I didn't think much of my job, I was only a manual worker. Now I know I'm a **good** care assistant and it's an important job and I feel important".

"This course has helped me understand how clients at the Centre feel".

Supervisors Comments:

Home Helps who have been on a course are more interested in their jobs and more self-confident.

Prison Officers

A very different background I was asked to work with Pat Wright for one day on a one-week course for Prison Officers who work with "Lifers", teaching "communication skills", using video. Participants ranged over the hierarchical scale up to Assistant Governor!

There were 17, and we spent the first part of the morning in plenary sharing their work situations. Pat then offered some input on basic counselling skills - empathy, listening, reflecting back, paraphrasing, transacting (viz Gerard Egan, "The Skilled Helper") and we modelled two examples. The men were then divided into groups and worked in pairs practising reflecting, roleplaying work situations. After initial questioning, both of methods and their value, they seemed

glad to express some of the difficulties they encountered, although role-play! Reflecting back **is** a difficult skill to learn, and it was possible to encourage with sincerity (while privately wanting time to work on self-esteem, stereotyping and anger among other things!)

The afternoon was spent recording interviews and critiquing them in a small group. The interviews were in pairs, with one role-playing a prisoner and choosing the subject - each pair made its own decision, and the the three interviews I saw were all requests for a transfer! They were encouraged to intervene and comment on what was happening, not leaving it to me, and were surprisingly open about attitudes they noticed in themselves and their colleagues - although empathy with the prisoner was not the greatest skill. One, however, who role-played a prisoner said how resentful he felt that the Governor really wasn't listening to him, so he started sulking - that he would remember this on his return, maybe he could at least **listen** even if he couldn't give them what they wanted. We received lengthy evaluations of the whole course, and a large proportion had considered the communication skills very valuable - some asked for much longer - although there were the inevitable two who felt it was a waste of time and they learnt nothing - if my guess about their identity was correct, I would agree!

Housing Officers

Interviewing Skills - a three-day course with a one-day follow-up, for Housing Managers organised by the School of Management of the Polytechnic of the South Bank. On each course participants are from the same Borough - teamwork and internal expectations become an important part of the course. From the beginning, armed with notebooks and eagerly reading handouts, participants are asked to set their learning objectives by sharing - in pairs and fours - what they hope and fear from the course. There are certain planned structures - video interviews with 'real' clients, and some factual input but from the first exercise - a flipchart composed of qualities found in "The best - and worst housing manager you ever met" - learning through experiencing - listening exercises - sitting back to back, with eyes closed, both talking at once - etc; five minutes each talking about themselves, then feeding back what their partner said - opens many of the group and there is a remarkable degree of honesty. Staff emphasize the relationship between behaviour on the course and behaviour with clients and colleagues, or the need to "confront with care"; the group take responsibility in monitoring the video interviews, with staff intervention less obvious than I have observed in other 'Interviewing Skills' courses. One of my colleagues

spends an afternoon on basic T.A., which is always received with great enthusiasm and occasionally with an interest in following-up T.A. after the Course.

By the third day the contract is often changed - and two recurrent themes requested are dealing with anger/frustration and coping with distressed clients.

We use simulations for frustration and anger, with illuminating debriefing the ways we dealt with them - including physical attack and running away! They spend the follow-up day on issues they have returned with, related to the questions "How have you changed - have you encountered any special difficulty - are there new skills you want to learn?" Part of the staff contract is to guarantee support and co-operation from the Management responsible for the course and their acceptance of our confidentiality. Normally someone is available on the last day to listen to difficulties at work, together and their acceptance of our confidentiality. Normally someone is available on the last day to listen to difficulties at work, together with the mechanisms which could be set up to change situations. An unsigned list is available, but people usually own their own particular contribution - the combination of trust, growth in self-confidence and support from the group - enhanced by the honesty of a Manager who listens to their requests and will where possible implement them, with consultation. They spend the final session planning on-going mutual support groups - and requesting courses for the rest of their Department!

Summary

There are occasions on all training courses when individuals need more experienced counselling, if deep distress surfaces. I am normally able to offer a lunch-hour, or time afterwards, or to suggest places or people where further work may be done - I recognise my own boundaries but at the same time feel the responsible trainer must at least offer the opportunity to continue growth, and the confidentiality of Courses precludes reporting back. Distress and the request for further personal development seem very important and my fantasy is that people who change go on growing, or take back to work an attitude which makes others want some of the "goodies"! "People don't change . . . BUT . . . A new type of person is emerging in increasing numbers . . . with values very different from those in our present culture".

Reading:

- Carl Rogers: On Personal Power
 On Becoming A Person
Liam Hudson: Frames of Mind
Gerald Egan: The Skilled Helper
Virginia Satir: People-Making

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Sandy Dunlop

SYNECTICS: CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

The primary focus of the vast majority of groups in the human potential movement is the growth and development of the 'individual' in that group. Gestalt, bioenergy and psychosynthesis groups are some of the major examples. Few, if any, groups seem to be convened for a purpose beyond the specific development of the individual(s), focusing directly on such issues as conflict resolution in a divided team or how to get creative action and behaviour in a group of people working together.

This is not to say that more effective conflict resolution and more creative behaviour in a group does not result from an individual's development,; there is no doubt that it does. What it is saying is that the express purpose of the group is different and as a result the training methods, techniques taught and benefits gained are likely to be very different.

Regarding now, the matter of the development of a 'group' or 'team' or the individual as a team member there seem to be two basic approaches: