To Tessa

I am writing to you on my new machine, since, should you want this piece for TTT you will want a disk and I have to find out how to down load onto a disk.

( the old Amstrad is not happily IBM compatible )


GIVING A GROUP PERMISSION

Mario Rinvolucri

In the early life of a group it makes sense to give people permission to openly discuss group process. This has at least two effects: it helps them to intelligently monitor what is going on round them and it establishes you as some one who knows their business as a trainer.

Let me offer you two examples of permission giving.

1.PROJECTIONS

Since it is inevitable that some people in the group you are working with will have projections on each other and maybe on you it is useful to make this whole area discussable. ( a projection is when you meet a new person and immediately get powerfully reminded of some one else you know ) Here's one way to do it:

- Take in a soft ball or a ball made of scrunched-up newspaper and lay it in the centre of the circle.
- Explain that each person should look round the group and see if anyone reminds them of a person they already know. If there is someone in the group who does they pick up the ball, throw it to them and say:
> " You are like X because ......."
> " you are different from X because...."

( When a person has come out with six sameness reasons, it is important they should find at least three difference reasons. The projection is clearly very strong if the person finds it hard to find any non-superficial differences. )

- In a group of 20 participants it is normal for a third to half the participants to have a projection on another member of the group that they can share at this stage.

- round the exercise off by saying that the projections aired tend to be positive ones since negative ones are hard to share at the start of a group. Also point out that the projections people have shared are those they are conscious of . Suggest that some of the most interesting ones are probably not yet conscious and may come to consciousness over the next few days.

( A supposition behind this work is that projections ( or plonking the image you have on one person onto another) get in the way of any genuine meeting with the person as they are, in their own reality.

I have a friend who disputes this: she tells of a deep friendship that started from an absurd projection, but a highly positive one. She feels that there can be uncanny accuracy in a projection )

## 2. REASONS FOR NOT TAKING FULL PART IN THE GROUP.

For some people joining a group is a quick, easy process. For others it is more difficult There may be some people who had thoughts of "running way" on their way to your group on the first day. A relatively safe way of bringing some of these feelings out is to ask the trainees to think back to a language learning or teacher training group they have belonged to before. Ask them to see themselves in that space again, to notice the smell of the room, the colour of the walls, and the people sitting either side of them. Now give them this dictation :

" In that group were there people who .......

- were scared of being judged by another participant ?

- were afraid of not expressing themselves clearly and so of not being understood?

- were blocked by a serious personal problem ?

- felt uninvolved with the subject matter of the workshop?

- thought they did not know enough about what we were doing?

- felt rejected by the others?

- stayed silent to show their opposition to what was going on?

- found the level of debate went over their heads?

- kept silent, waiting for the right moment to speak ?

- stayed out of the discussions to keep them as short as possible ?

- were forced to attend this group ?

- were just too knackered to take part?

After the dictation ask the trainees to work in small groups and exchange experiences. Some will talk about themselves and their level of participation in the previous group while some will find that too dangerous and talk about others.

They will be involved in a memory lane trip but are in fact implicitly thinking and talking about their future behaviour in this group.

( the ideas in the dictation come from Page 164 and 165 of Animation de Groupes, Charles Maccio, published by Chronique Sociale, Lyon. I have offered you less than a quarter of the reasons Maccio suggests for a participant not taking her full place in the life of the group. I have used the ideas he classifies under " Reasons for non-participation that come from within the group-member " He has three more sets of ideas:

" reasons dependent on group-leader attitudes and behaviour "

" reasons to do with the group "

" technical reasons " eg: the presence of an outsider, lack of logical coherence in the workshop, impossible furniture arrangement etc..."

In working with themes like non-participation or projections near the start of a training group you are making clear to the group where part of your own observational and thinking energy is focussed. In my own case I am quite explicit with my trainees about dividing my energy, focus and feeling thrust between these three areas:

THE OVERT GROUP TASK : in a language teacher training group this could be Mike McCarthy's discoveries about the grammar of oral UK English or techniques for helping a Finn to hear the difference between P and B.

THE HERE AND NOW OF THE GROUP : this could be to do with needing to up and move, it could be to do with a conflict within the group, it could be to do with thrill and excitment.

INDIVIDUAL: STUFF FROM THE PAST: there are times when a teaching problem has its roots in the person's history. Sometimes it may make sense to the individual and to the group to go back in time and explore the area.

In working with non-participation and and projection I am high-lighting the importance of the here and now of the group.

Dear Reader, I suspect that you too may give a variety of permissions in the first day or two of a training course. What areas do you, implicitly or explicitly, open up for your trainees?

Why not write and tell colleagues round the world via the pages of THE TEACHER TRAINER.?

ps: I wonder what permisions I deny over the first days of a course? I wonder what areas come to define themselves as forbidden territory. Last September, in the presence of a deeply religious trainee, I became aware that I implicitily deny the dimension of God on a training course. This would be pretty serious were I to be