

From Mario Rinvoluceri/Pilgrims/ [REDACTED] Street/ Canterbury [REDACTED] / UK

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To Derrin [REDACTED] /International House/ [REDACTED] Barcelona/Spain

Dear Derrin,

I enclose a disk and print version of what happened at the SIGs meeting in Saffron Walden, UK on the last days of November in my workshop. If I leave the write-up until your generous deadline of Jan 8th, it won't happen.

Hope this stuff is of use,

Mario Rinvoluceri

Biodata: Mario has worked nearly 25 years with Pilgrims: the school started in July 1974.

His most recent book is WAYS OF DOING, with Paul Davis and Barbara Garside, brought out by Cambridge in Feb 1999.

TEACHERS CHANGE THEMSELVES VIA SUPER-VISION

by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK.

This one of those good workshops where I gave the participants something but they gave me plenty back.

Let me start with my learnings:

1. I discovered that, among the 40 people in the room, there were several who were either very knowledgeable about and/or very keen to learn more about the area of teacher mutual counselling.

Elisabeth Ibsen has been involved in mutual counselling schemes in her university dept in Oslo. University teachers paired off, visited each other's classes, and then counselled each other around what they had observed.

Is the climate in UK universities ready for this kind of collaborative behaviour?

Elisabeth has also been involved in schemes in which teacher trainees did

mutual counselling.

Rhys Jones has been involved in teaching basic mentoring/ counselling skills to tutors working in the East Kent Adult education services. He was well into the topic we had come together to explore.

Stephen Carter told us that his institution, London Guildhall University, was on the way to setting up a cross-faculty mentoring system. Some one from sociology, say, would come and watch Stephen teach and Stephen would do the same to him. Stephen has tried this and when he told the colleague that his transparencies were invisible from the back of the lecture theatre, the colleague snapped back: "I don't care if students can't see them." Stephen's experience makes it pretty clear how disastrous it can be to introduce mentoring schemes from top-down.

Matthew Cruikshank, from the ESADE Business School in Barcelona, is keenly interested in bringing teacher co-counselling into the ESADE staffroom but told me he was well aware that to bring it in by fiat would make little sense.

I was overjoyed to discover that the whole area of mutual mentoring, co-counselling, or mutual supervision was so seriously on some people's agendas already. Finding this out really made me want to get stuck in and offer the group my pen nyworth of salt.

GROUPS I CARRY ROUND FROM BEFORE

We read this text, part of a letter from a good friend:

"I carry about a great many groups from the past with me. I often think back over them.

This is partly because I have great difficulty in letting go of experiences that make me feel good.

I need a constant reinforcement of feeling that I am both getting across to my students whatever it is that I am trying to transmit and that I am liked and appreciated. I think it would be true to say that the extent to which this actually occurs has much more to do with them than with what I do, since I always get on well with classes that the colleagues I most appreciate also seem to get on well with. But that doesn't alter the need I feel for regular 'stroking'. In that context I find it very hard to get rid of those who do 'stroke' plenty.

(the above is an extract from text we read)

It is clear that for this writer groups he carries round with him are what NLP calls a

resource state, they are part of his support system.

WHAT SORT OF SUPPORT SYSTEM DO YOU HAVE?

I asked each participant to draw herself in the middle of a piece of paper and round her everything that supported her in her job. I suggested that in my case a warm bath in the early morning was a powerful trigger to rich, semi-conscious thought about the group I was teaching, as was sharing the teaching of the group with a colleague I respect. Possible supports might include books, dictionaries, local native-speaker informants, a spouse etc.....

I also suggested that each person jot down anything that blocked them from fully using the support that was available to them. Participants then shared what they had written.

About five years ago I became aware that no one practising therapy would work with clients without having a qualified third person to go and talk to about their own feelings, a supervisor.

I sought out a colleague I felt I could trust and saw them each day for the two week period of this course for half an hour each day. What a relief it was to be able to let my hair down and unburden myself. How had I managed to stay bottled up in myself over 25 years of teaching?

You may well be wondering what a super-vision consists of:

MUTUAL SUPERVISION GROUND RULES

1. Choose a person you feel you can talk to seriously. It is best not to choose a bosom pal or a gossip partner. Choose some one you do not share classes with.
Make sure that they are happy to have you as their counsellor.
2. Choose a time for meeting and a place that will allow both of you to concentrate without distractions like phones etc.... Decide on the frequency and length of the meetings.
3. Confidentiality is central to decent mutual supervision work. How can I tell you things that leave me vulnerable if I think you might leak them round the colleague group?
4. The counsellor's task is to listen as empathetically as they can, without either judgement or the need to give advice. The counsellor may want to ask the odd clarificatory question but will not ask questions that divert the flow of the protagonist's thought and feeling.
5. Half the time is spent with one person as protagonist and then the two reverse roles and the speaker becomes the empathetic listener. Herein lies the mutuality

and equality, that is very different from a traditional supervisory set-up in the social services or in therapy, where the supervisor is often the practitioner's boss.

These ground rules provoked some powerful questions in the group:

A. "Isn't it a real pity for the two people never to visit each other's classes? Surely Person B might really see ways that A could do things differently?"

The answer to this very common-sensical question is that if I am your counsellor and I have seen the lesson you are talking to me about I have my own ideas about what you did well or ill, I have my own thoughts about how I might have run the class. All this is garbage and stands between me and the story of that class as you see it, hear it and feel to have gone. The only thing we can usefully work on is your story of the class, your impression of the class, your mapping of the class. You will ONLY CHANGE FROM WITHIN YOUR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL FRAME. So only this is relevant.

B: "Surely the counsellor feels some responsibility to help the other person, to give them support, encouragement and advice, it's only human"

If the colleague in counsellor role comes up with lots of phrases like:

if I were you.....

well,... in your shoes, I'd

you might be better of if.....

take it from me....

then she knows she is way off course. As counsellor she is NOT the other person and there is little point in her borrowing their shoes. Advice giving, in this context, is most of the time a warm, friendly, human idiocy/ irrelevance.

C. "Why all this complicated palaver? Why not sit down with a trusted friend and open your heart?"

This question was put to me by Embarek Oulfkih, chair person of the Cambridge Teachers' Association. I do not have an answer to Embarek's question and in the question I feel the full weight of his Egyptian culture. Within the value system of this culture it is kind of absurd to create an "artificial friend" for a particular purpose. Go to your real friends and unburden

yourself with them. Maybe, too, there is something undignified, unadult, about going to some one to avoid your life responsibilities, to have a good whinge.

I have no answer because I have often felt that Western therapeutic thinking from Freud down to us has always had an arrogant, universalist assumption and has not taken deep cultural variables into account. Has anybody yet proposed a Japanese variant of NLP? There are good reason for thinking there would be a case for doing just this.

During Embarek's intervention I had a keen sense of the goofiness of proposing mutual supervision for an Egyptian context. Often Western wine is unfortified and travels badly.

WHAT AREAS CAN A SUPERVISION USEFULLY COVER?

In their book, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, (Open University, 1989), Hawkins and Shohet suggest six areas which people may want to explore. They are:

1. Thoughts about the content of the lesson/s. The point of this thinking is for the teacher to pay attention to the students and the choices the students are making.
2. Exploration of the techniques and strategies used by the teacher. What techniques did the teacher use, when and why. What could she have done differently?
3. Reflection on the teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships at both conscious and unconscious level. Why does the teacher remember some student names but not others?
What do voice, posture and gesture tell about the relationships across the classroom.
4. Digging out all the secret stuff the teacher carries after a class. Fear, frustration, guilt, stuff that the situation in class drags back from the teacher's own past.
5. Looking at the ways in which the situation between the teacher and her supervisor perhaps resembles and mirrors the way she is with the students.
If, say, the teacher mothers the supervisor, maybe she tries to do the same with the students.
6. The supervisor shares with the teacher the stuff that comes up for her during the supervision.
It is the supervisor's job to tailor this material so it is useful to the teacher.

In the supervision situations I have experienced in the past five years I have mostly worked at levels 1 through 4. I would love to try the last two levels.

If you think mutual counselling might help you feel easier with your teaching and if you

want to avoid burn-out and boredom, don't be put off by technicalities in this article.

Find a colleague and have a go. You may not be superbly skilful at first but you will find out for yourself what works.

Personally I would now no longer work as a teacher or as a trainer without the haven of counselling, without the mirror of counselling and without the togetherness of counselling.

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