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Experiential Learning in Groups II

Recent Developments in Dissemination and Application*

Institutional Reproduction

This is a process that began in 1963; and I take this heading from Rice (1965). During the 1960s and early 1970s, the national and international demand for the Leicester model of group relations training was such that there were pressures to devote more and more time to conference work. However, the staff of TIHR who have been involved in the Leicester Conferences over the years have never wanted to be exclusively or even mainly in the business of running training activities. Continuing experience as practitioners has been seen as a necessary condition for effectiveness in conference work. The TIHR response, therefore, was to encourage and help other institutions in Britain and abroad to acquire their own capabilities to sponsor and staff events based on the Leicester approach.

The earliest examples of the 1960s were, in England, the Grubb Institute (formerly Christian Teamwork) and, in the United States, the Washington School of Psychiatry (initially in association with the Yale University School of Medicine). In both cases, the TIHR co-sponsored a series of "Leicester-type" conferences, initially providing the conference director and most staff, until the institutions were equipped with a large enough pool of trained staff to run the events themselves. By this time the staff were by no means exclusively drawn from the Tavistock Institute and Clinic, or from the other initial sponsoring institution, the University of Leicester. Initiation of an Advanced Training Group from 1962 onwards made it possible to develop a broader pool of trained staff from education, industry, the prison and probation services, and so forth, some of whom were then deployed on the new conferences. Reciprocally, staff of the new institutions enlarged the pool that could be drawn upon for Leicester, in a process that still continues.

*A new paper.

Subsequently, there has been similar collaboration in other countries, including France (with the International Foundation for Social Innovation), India (the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta) and more recently Israel. One interesting feature of the French development is that the conferences were established as bi-lingual from the beginning. Either language is used by members and staff indiscriminately. Although many members and some staff are essentially monolingual, with very limited comprehension of the other language, this does not appear to be a significant handicap to their understanding of the dynamics; and indeed (as I can confirm from my own experience on the staff of a Finnish conference) ignorance of the words may heighten one's attention to the "music." The French conferences attract an international membership.

Meanwhile the American conference institution, which, after Rice died in 1969, was separately incorporated in the following year as the A.K. Rice Institute (AKRI), has not only developed a set of regional affiliates, straddling the country, each of which runs conferences based on the Leicester model, but has itself engaged in a similar institution-building process in Sweden. There, the earlier conferences that used imported staff were in English; then, as the local institution, AGSLO, became self-sufficient, the conference language shifted to Swedish. Conferences have also been run in other countries without (so far) the subsequent development of a viable local institution. Examples include: TIHR and the Grubb Institute in Ireland; the Grubb Institute in Italy, and AKRI in Iceland. In yet other countries, local groups have taken the initiative to develop their own capability to run conferences. Finland and Germany are well established examples. The catchment area of the German institution (MundO) includes Austria and Switzerland. There are recently formed or incipient institutions in Norway, Denmark and Mexico.

All the above identify themselves both as implementing a version of the Leicester model and as drawing directly on the resources and advice either of the GRTP in TIHR or of one of the established sister institutions. In addition there are some institutions, such as the Australian Institute of Social Analysis, which are developing their own distinctive approaches to training, based partly on the Leicester model.

What has occurred in a partly unplanned way is a consensual process of accreditation, initially by TIHR alone and then increasingly through peer relationships among not only TIHR but other institutions. Interchanges of staff have been crucial to this process. There are nevertheless a few bodies, in the United States and elsewhere, which offer events described as using the "Tavistock model," but which in some cases use staff with minimum direct experience of the conferences and which remain outside this informal mechanism of reciprocal quality control.

To come back to the British scene, there have been collaborative relation-

ships with several institutions besides the Grubb Institute, but these have ended with the departure or death of key personnel. Examples include the Bristol University School of Education, Manchester Business School and the Chelmsford Cathedral Center for Research and Training.

Still nearer home, the close collaboration in this work between the Tavistock Clinic and Institute has persisted, even though as institutions they have been separate for 40 years. Jock Sutherland, the first post-war Medical Director of the Clinic, made a major input into the early conferences, from 1957 onwards. (After he retired, he set up the Scottish Institute of Human Relations, which also organized conferences, some in association with TIHR.) His successor in the role (re-designated Chairman of the Professional Committee), Robert Gosling, was actively involved throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until he too retired. The Clinic's own annual non-residential conference, for students and staff, is based on the Leicester model, and this has swollen the numbers of Clinic professionals equipped for conference staff roles. The current Chairman, Anton Obholzer, continues the tradition. Recent Leicester Conferences have been co-sponsored by the Tavistock Clinic Foundation and he has directed two of them.

Adaptation

Within the series of Leicester Conferences themselves various different designs have been developed. New events have been added to the repertoire. If the Very Small Group (VSG) represents the size of many working teams, the Median Group (MG) of 15–30 reflects the problems of many committees and councils in oscillating between the dynamics of the small and large groups. The Praxis Event (PE), introduced by Lawrence (Miller, 1980; Lawrence, 1985), removes a further layer of structure. During it, the administrator manages the outer boundary of the conference, while the director and all other staff relinquish their managerial and consultant roles, thus dissolving the internal member/staff boundary. Left with only a set of individuals and a negotiated primary task (which is basically to study what is happening while it happens), one is confronted with both creative opportunities and self-imposed constraints in using the freedoms.

The set of events used in any one conference may be programmed in different permutations. For example, although the Small Study Group (SSG) has always had an important place, in some designs the Large Study Group (LSG) has been given priority both as the first session every day and in the overall number of sessions. (This tends to produce some differences in the dynamics: typically, more sustained development of myth and metaphor in the LSG and more concern with individualism in the SSG.) However, the study of authority has remained the central focus and task.