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**An exploration
of how societal conflicts
are mediated
in the experiential group setting**

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Abstract

This paper explores lessons learned from twenty five years experience of courses in community development and youth work, which have a focus on democratic social change, and the promotion of racial and sexual equality. Aimed at mature students, our approach, has developed and refined a model of education and training by combining group work techniques and experiential learning, enabling students to reflect critically on their life experience, process feelings, and attempt to develop a conceptual understanding of their experience. Many of our students have negative experiences of formal education. Thoughtful recruitment ensures that our students are culturally diverse, and that women and recent refugees to the U.K. , are strongly represented, which provides the diversity of backgrounds and experience key to anti discriminatory work and the experiential learning process.

The paper sets the course in a wider social and economic context, and identifies phases experienced by students in the group work setting.

An exploration of how societal conflicts are mediated in the experiential group setting

Introduction

Globalisation has been described as an 'awesome force shaping our times', [Robins 1990:204]. Our lives are increasingly affected by decisions made elsewhere in the world. Global interdependence now encompasses not only economic strategies but has also spread to include the social, cultural and political. Globalisation, assisted by global communication networks, gives the impression of a shrinking world, '...economics and cultures are thrown into intense and immediate contact with each other' [Robins op.cit.:204]. In this global context the 'other' could be interpreted as refugees, people of colour, or travellers.

This challenge is fundamental to our thinking in developing the philosophy and methods of the community and youth work training and practice offered at Goldsmiths College. The relationships between colonisers, imperialists and the 'other', once addressed across great distance, are now part of the 'Western metropolis' [ibid:203]. This is brought sharply into focus by our student cohort, which brings together black and white people, as well as recent refugees to Britain. The growing global problem of stateless refugees pushes the world system towards the question of global political citizenship, [Colomy 1992:215], but the inextricable connection between nationalist revival and globalisation noted by Robertson [1990], poses a real threat to the prospect of a global state with human rights at its heart, [Heywood 1994:76] .

In Britain the ruling Conservative Party opposition to the European Union and the Social Chapter raise issues of nationalism, human rights and competition, and immigration policies raise questions of citizenship and entitlement. Macshane [1995:44-5], while reviewing a recent critique of globalisation by Hirst & Thompson [1996], voices concern about the notion of globalisation being used as an excuse for the shift of money from the poor to the better off and further suggests that the British government's commitment to globalisation and anti-Europeanism ensure that wealth and privilege is maintained by those who already have it.

It is within this context that the struggle for social justice takes place. Social justice needs to direct itself to confronting marginalisation, in non-paternalistic ways. Marginalism, described by Harvey [1991] as 'one of the most crucial problems facing urban life in the 21st century' has the ability to exert distinctive forms of oppression. Mechanisms facilitating participation in planning and policy practices have been eroded. The factors relating to marginalisation at an intra-group level are central to discussion and debate in the experiential element of our students' training.

Change agents in training need to make meaningful connections between these wider social issues, and the practical implications for those with whom they work. It involves assisting students to make associations between how the rise in new right ideology under Thatcherism and the resulting cuts in public expenditure, application of market principles to welfare and public services in the shape of privatisation and the contract culture has transformed the individual to consumer. The replacement of economic policy with the market effectively marginalises those without the means to take part in a consumerist culture.

Training which seeks to address economic and political exclusion and empowerment, based on collective action, needs to reflect this in the training methods used.

Experiential learning is learning from doing (practice) and learning from experience (being in it). In truth some types of training/learning lend themselves more to this than others. Experiential learning is not a panacea for all types of training, but in training 'helping professionals' it is, we believe, essential. It is essential in enabling students to make the transition from the inactivity of constant theorising and conceptualising to the facilitation of change in collaboration with others. We have found that presenting issues in ways which students can make sense of in terms of their own everyday experience, offer opportunities for high levels of engagement often absent from didactic methods.

The centrepiece of the experiential process for community and youth work students at Goldsmiths is the Yeargroup. It is a two hour group meeting, conducted on a weekly basis throughout the life of the course. The Yeargroup process is the focus of this paper. It provides students with a bridge between the three major components of their training:

reflections on their previous working and personal experiences of life; current fieldwork practice and the theoretical and conceptual considerations they grapple with during training. In effect it performs a similar function to that described by Annikki Jarvinen [1989] in her work with nurse educators in Finland where she found that '...students have adopted the processes of *learning to learn* and *learning to reflect my own practice* as part of their everyday lives. There was a similar development in their readiness and ability to share their experiences with others, which is an essential stage of reflective thinking'.

It is our belief that these training techniques are transferable to other situations, particularly those which focus on community-based skills training, such as the training of community development workers and community health workers.

This paper outlines the history of the course, now over 25 years old, setting it in its changing political and cultural context, and the way in which training methods - whilst retaining a core philosophy - have been adapted over the years. The experiential Year Group is described in detail, taking the reader through the 5 phases we observe students experiencing. Our role, as tutors, is then considered. The paper touches also on an important question which challenges traditional psychoanalytic assumptions. This concerns how the effects of a lifetime of social and economic discrimination experienced by sections of the population can leave people scarred. However, whilst the hurt and anger which results from this can become internalised, to pathologise it is to take an apolitical view which fails to examine socio-economic forces.

The Goldsmiths Course Context

The two year undergraduate course in community and youth work, in existence since 1970, was established against a background of urban initiatives, designed to combat poverty and disadvantage in the inner cities.

The aim was to train those '...who had not succeeded in traditional education' [Turkie 1995:160], but were already doing 'useful work' in their own community. It was the view of course designers that by attracting people to the course who had shared the life and experiences of local people, trying to make a difference to their community, they

would be less inclined to see people as the 'problem' and more likely to understand and identify with them as those who had problems to overcome.

The training methods were experiential, ... 'books were not central to the course' [ibid:160]. Students negotiated much of the programme, which was often delivered in 'common sense' terms, by professionals working in the field. Students spent half their time in large and small group settings, where issues raised in lectures could be discussed and ideas exchanged. The other half was spent in the field, gaining supervised practical experience in a variety of settings.

Learning through experience offered opportunities to fully engage with and reflect on situations before comparing, integrating, re - interpreting or rejecting a theoretical understanding of situations, thus enabling students to construct their own 'corner stones' of knowledge or homemade theories. They were encouraged to embrace new and challenging experience and question traditional power relationships, in an effort to find effective and practical ways of responding to them.

The principles underpinning the course were that students were being trained for adversity and uncertainty, that the wealth of valuable experience and knowledge already contained within students when combined with experiential training methods, effectively enabled students to internalise their learning.

While the course has changed over the years and quite radically very recently, it has retained its commitment to those principles and to experiential learning as a valuable tool for the development of professional and personal development.

The course still demands, as part of its entry requirements, that students are aged over 23 years, with at least two years experience in the field. Their experiences are varied ranging from work with tenants associations, youth clubs, drug rehabilitation projects etc. The recent change in course status to higher diploma level has seen for the first time, the introduction of written work, as part of the selection process. In a climate where learning outcomes must be quantifiable, exams have, somewhat reluctantly, been introduced as part of the assessment process, which necessitates a more detailed evaluation of ability at the point of entry. However, the cohort remains

predominantly peopled by those who have had less than a positive experience of formal education.

The new modularised programme seeks to reflect the changing needs of community and youth workers in the 90's. The last decade has witnessed major changes in the field of community and youth work practice in Britain. The rolling back of the state, new managerialism with its emphasis on performance appraisal and measurements of success borrowed from the private sector means that students must be in possession of a wide range of transferable skills. Reductions in the role and power of local authorities, and the focus on individual responsibility have presented a challenge to collectivism, and means that students need, more than ever, to be ready for adversity and uncertainty, both in relation to themselves and with respect to those they work with.

The course recruits 25 students each year. The 1995 intake of 65% of students from African-Caribbean or Asian decent, [including three black* students who are recent refugees to Britain] and 60% women [ibid:152] is typical. The diversity and range of the students provides one of the most fertile sources for student learning.

The week is divided equally between practical experience in the field and college based work which includes lectures, seminars, Yeargroup meetings and tutorials. Assessment at the end of term is a collaboration between student and tutor, based on clearly identified criteria.

Five themes permeate the course: class, 'race'**, gender, sexuality and special needs. They are presented to students in terms of developing the skills to work productively with difference and adopting flexible approaches to the work which seeks to address perceived need with individuals and groups.

The themes - their relationship to social policy, social justice, disadvantage, personal relationships - and how they will be represented within the course structure are made explicit at the beginning of the course. A consistent approach to the issues of power relationships and discrimination, which encompasses lectures, tutorials, Yeargroup meetings, seminars and practical fieldwork experience, offers many opportunities to integrate what has been learned from experience in the field with what has been introduced

through lectures. How more 'informed' practice was experienced and its relationship to past experience is a regular question put to students.

The diploma students will experience entry into higher education very differently from those who take a more traditional and direct route. Whilst many on the one hand may have blocks in relation to learning, they may also have a very strong desire to succeed, second time round, particularly in the more traditional ways in which success is appraised eg. essays and exams. Students usually find taking responsibility for their learning, an empowering experience.

By contrast our M.A. students who have often had positive experiences of education, or at least experienced success, are in the main unable to break the cycle of expectation associated with the 'empty vessel' notion of learning. They therefore wait to be fed. Coming from the academic experience their expectation is that they will be filled with the knowledge of others. As they begin their professional training they are expected to do their own thinking, and are consulted on their learning/training needs which comes as a shock. They struggle with this, until they allow the possibility that this could be a liberating experience.

As one would expect, the social and economic position of the student group, reflects the complex and inter-related social inequalities present in the 'real' world. However for most white students, this will be their first experience of a group in which they are not in the majority. For black students it may be the first time that they are. The learning agenda will be different for each student, depending on their individual experience, perspective and identity, the extent to which they are willing to engage with others, and open themselves to seeing the world differently. An awareness of, and the ability to articulate, how this impacts on their interactions with others will play a major role in the students' capacity to benefit from the experiential learning process.

Students begin their training with varying levels of awareness of the interpersonal politics of 'race', gender and class, and varying degrees of understanding of how inequality impacts on people's sense of self. Some students may have deep-seated heterosexist attitudes or homophobic prejudices. Some have a clearer understanding of the roots of racism. Others believe we are all equal and have equal opportunity.

Clearly, any group of people come together with a range of levels of political and psychological sophistication.

In our view, power and identity and how they operate within societal structures, as well as within personal relationships, is significant. 'Power inequalities are embedded in people's consciousness, as well as within social structures' [Frosh '87]. The highly contested nature of identity, can often seem contradictory or strategic. 'It has to be acknowledged that no simple common denominator of a 'race', class and gender strategy exists' [Williams 1989:xvi]. Individual aspirations and actions are not dominated by any single or simple method of division.

The two year training aims to help students to develop both their understanding of the social and political climate within which they find themselves and also to develop a greater sense of self-knowledge and self-awareness. The experiential Yeargroup is the focus for this learning. The nature of the meeting, while built on the foundations of an exchange of information between staff and students, generates the material which makes this forum one of the most effective experiential learning tools within the course structure. The Yeargroup offers opportunities for the exploration of diversity and difference, through experience.

The Year Group

As with most groups the groupworker - in this case the tutors - are seen as very central by the group members during its' early life. Whilst we are at pains to emphasise that the group's programme can be significantly determined by the students themselves we also exploit opportunities to make observations which name and make explicit the social and cultural differences which are manifest in the student group and point to their relationship to social justice in the wider world.

It is our belief that experiential learning in the group setting is about openness to personal movement and change. This movement is made possible when two factors co-exist. Firstly, there should be a level of desire/motivation to change, and the second relates to the emotional maturity of individual group members. Conscious understanding of one's feelings are obviously difficult without the latter, and act to impede openness to change.

Such emotional blockages have their roots in early childhood

experiences and/or may emanate from social or cultural pressures (eg. racism) experienced outside of a home environment which may inform the degree of trust people have in others. Both sets of feelings can become deeply internalised.

Grappling with this is painful and difficult. In a setting in which expression of feeling is actively encouraged, and seen as an essential part of the learning process, students can become fearful of the internal conflicts which emerge and of the conflicts which emerge within the group. They fear their potential for self-destructiveness and their capacity to be destructive to others. And tutors risk the possibility of not necessarily coping with the rising temperature of the group [Rosen 1993].

Attempting to work concurrently with our cognitive and emotional self can be described as integration, in contrast to what Weil [1993] describes as 'disjunction', 'a sense of being at odds with oneself'. In this respect we are especially concerned to get to grips with aspects of our social identity which have become, or risk becoming, internalised in an alien and discriminating world. A black person or a gay man may harbour anxious feelings for fear of attack. However, in the light of murders - in the UK at least - which are motivated by racism or heterosexism, to pathologise these fears is potentially very damaging. In the experiential setting of the Yeargroup tutors speak from the outset of, racism, heterosexism and sexism as givens, and refer frequently to differences in the group based on 'race', sexual orientation, gender and class. It is possible to address levels of distrust - often experienced by both black and white students - even in the training forum when the stakes are quite high. In a South African context Swanepoel and de Beer explore the impact an explicit recognition of difference made to black and white students working together: 'Situations, positions and givens are being severely scrutinised and criticised by blacks and this has a direct bearing on their position vis-a-vis that of the whites in a training group. Because of this the whites feel insecure and tend to be defensive'. It is both difficult and liberating. [1995:296].

However, there are also dangers in this approach. In a setting in which the students initially put much energy into denial tutors risk reinforcing this avoidance by seemingly pushing the students into seeing the tutors as problem-creators. Additionally tutors risk speaking for and of students anger, rather than waiting for the students

to do this themselves in their own time. This is set against the fact that 'permission' to explore students' personal feelings and social identity is not normally encouraged in university settings. Students tend to arrive with preconceived ideas about what happens in higher education and these do not include expression of feeling. This mismatch between expectation and reality can be experienced as disappointing for some students, and thus can take time to unlearn. The opportunities which this forthright approach affords, however, are considerable. By unlocking deep-seated feelings about their sense of self and their relationship to others students can become more able to learn and achieve in the more traditional aspects of the training such as lectures or essay writing. The interdependency of experiential learning and more formal forms of learning is viewed by us as vital to the development of fuller more rounded workers, and creates a form of social education which appropriately mirrors the objectives of professional practice, perhaps particularly of youth work.

The 5 Phases of the Experiential Group

The two year experience can be seen as developing through 5 distinct phases, which in many respects mirror established group work theories of development. These are:

- Phase 1: Varying levels of unknowing and unconscious feelings.
- Phase 2: Denial and resistance (to painful feelings). Fear of conflict. Fear of hurting others. Honeymoon period over. Sub-groups begin to emerge.
- Phase 3: Conflict hits the surface. Entrenchment. Withdrawal of commitment (resistance to feelings). Group interactions reflect society's tensions (for instance sub-groupings along 'race' and gender lines become explicit).
- Phase 4: Conflict (if named and addressed) leads to a greater level of understanding and more mature communication.
- Phase 5: Resolution. New understanding/acknowledgement of difference.

Phase 1: Unknowing or unconscious feelings

The beginning phase of the training for many students is typically characterised by a sense of anxiety, for instance, about being in higher

education per se; it is also about belonging and finding one's place in the group; and about recognition. However, the explicit emphasis on personal and social identity is often new for students. Clearly we are all preoccupied - albeit to varying degrees - with our identity and our relationship to others, but consideration of this is often a private and carefully protected matter. We have degrees of comfort with the interplay between our private 'inner selves' and our social 'outer selves' [Ackerman 1958]. Bringing this to conscious thought and into group discussion can be felt as threatening. Initially, external social attitudes and power dimensions between students may be recognised. However anxieties during the initial stages of the group and the varying levels of unknowing and unconscious feelings moderate to some degree open acknowledgement that this is taking place. Some individuals, usually men, often grasp the perceived opportunity for leadership in the absence of intrusive facilitation by the Yeargroup tutors, only to find their position challenged on the basis of their gender or 'race'. Initial bids for leadership, except in exceptional circumstances, are usually challenged. The students sense of their identity and place in the world will determine the sensibilities of the group. Whilst some students are ready to be combative, many tend to want to homogenise with others, to deny difference. A form of 'pseudo socialisation', [Agazarian & Peters 1988] takes place. Cries of "I don't see myself as different" or "isn't it racist to keep on talking about black and white" or "you are creating problems which aren't there" are often heard. Tutors of course don't pick issues out of thin air, but are attuned to the subtleties of group behaviour which indicate when and how group members reinforce difference, such as seating position, use of language, friendship sub-groups within the larger group, associational flow*** and so on. Most importantly we name these differences.

Phase 2: Denial & Resistance

It is not surprising that defences begin to emerge as this process can be very threatening. We construct defensive walls around ourselves for good reason and a delicate balance needs to be carefully negotiated by tutors at this stage. The aim is not for group members to conduct themselves as they might in a therapeutic setting, not least because this is not what a community and youth work student contracts or bargains for when embarking on training. Even in safer small group or one-to-one tutorials we are clear as tutors that counselling is not appropriate. The challenges being asked of students at this stage often result in a resistance to declaring true feelings of, for instance, hurt

or anger. We have found that this resistance is informed by a variety of possible factors. One is a continuing denial that differences exist in the group, even in the face of evidence to the contrary in the group's behaviour. Furthermore, in group development terms the Yeargroup is, at this stage, still quite young. Group members are still wary of exposure and conflict. Denial also affords an intense emotional defence against the acknowledgement of pain, distress and fear. Peggy McIntosh [1995:130] speculates as to the cause of this denial in the American context, saying:

I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged in the curriculum, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women's disadvantage. These denials protect male privilege from being fully recognised, acknowledged, lessened or ended. Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon with a life of its own, I realised that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects. As a white person I realised I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites, are carefully taught not to recognise white privilege, as males are taught not to recognise male privilege.

If white men deny their advantage, we observe black people in the group seemingly denying their hurt and anger. This may be informed, as we suggest above, by a sense of having "survived without saying what I feel until now. Why should I start now?". It is natural to want to resist reliving painful experiences, particularly in a culturally diverse group. The Yeargroup may also be experienced as a hostile place, and as the group is large (usually 25 students and two tutors) it is more suited to socio-cultural discourse than to a more intimate interpersonal engagement [de Mare 1975 & Turkie 1995]. It is exactly this characteristic of the large group which provides a 'bridge between ourselves and our socio-cultural environment' [de Mare et. al. 1990]. Because intimacy is not possible in larger groups, not only do sub-groups form, but also the tendency to line up and divide in cultural or sub-cultural ways become the currency for the group. So a group of

Muslim students, black group members or gay male sub-groupings within the larger group should not at this stage be seen as a negative force, but as a means to future dialogue later in the group's life cycle. Of course there may be innumerable other forces at play. For instance, the pre-battle footing or stand-off which is manifest at this stage, may be informed by a fear of conflict or a fear of hurting.

Phase 3: Entrenchment, as conflict hits the surface

In the sometimes claustrophobic, hothouse environment of the training programme conflict will inevitably hit the surface sooner or later. The student group is not immune from the conflicts and prejudices which exist in the wider society. Students sometimes find the power relationships between students difficult to grasp. For example, white women and black men may, depending on the context, find themselves in the position of being oppressor or member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. Away from the Yeargroup, in discussion of community work practice or in lectures series on social policy we will draw on aspects of 'race', gender, class, sexual orientation and disability. This in turn reinforces a sense of it being okay to line up along these lines, and, as we suggest, sub-groupings will by this stage have become reasonably well established. The stronger sense of power which comes from, for example, women in the group openly identifying with each other the greater the preparedness by them to challenge sexist behaviour which they experience from men in the group. In the British context black members of the group are likely to experience various forms of racism. Having established a level of power and strength in the whole group they are more likely to give free expression to deeply felt life-long experiences of hurt and anger which they may have resisted earlier in the life of the group. It is worth observing that value systems can also determine how students line up with each other, these sometimes providing stronger alliances than those of, for example, gender and 'race'. These and other sub-groupings - perhaps around religious or national identity, or sexual orientation - become, in our experience, very entrenched. Over two academic calendar years this phase may become established after 4 to 6 months, and then dominate the experiential process for the next year or so. Again this should not be feared by the tutor/group worker but seen as part of a healthy process of development.

Phase 4: Conflict, leading to greater level of understanding

The group will begin to mature and make real progress only when its members can acknowledge and articulate the negative and prejudicial feelings they hold. Lesbian or gay members of the group will know from their experience in the wider world that many people are heterosexist and/or have homophobic feelings. Such people probably do them no favours by pretending otherwise. The benefit at this stage is that to openly engage in discussion with others about one's feelings, behaviour and actions is to begin to come to terms with the hurt to ourselves and others which results from being heterosexist. The same applies to other negative feelings we hold for whole groups or communities of people. A form of warfare - undeniably painful - will ensue on various fronts throughout this phase of the group's life. Invariably, and some may feel paradoxically, a greater level of contact, respect and understanding becomes evident between the various warring sub-groups. Of course this will only happen because students show a willingness to question the negative, stereotypic views they hold. (We anyway feel that students who cannot do this may not be ready to complete their training, as community work can only be effective if we are able to show equal respect for those we work with and for.) Remember also the maxim of experiential learning, referred to at the beginning of this paper, which is about openness to personal movement and change.

Phase 5: Acknowledgement of difference and resolution

The deep and challenging level of interaction experienced during the phase characterised by conflict bears directly on this ending phase in which a degree of resolution can frequently be expected. Importantly, group members will know from their experience that the group can contain difficult feelings, and that it can survive hostility. Open conflict based on attitudes and values can lead, as we suggest, to greater levels of understanding and respect for others. This is particularly true when the accepted cultural norms in the community and youth work profession is to challenge social injustice. Few argue with the enormous value of challenging social injustice based on race, gender, sexual orientation and economic power. To not discriminate against people with disabilities, or against people because of their religious beliefs or national identities, or because they are older or younger may be viewed as only a manifestation of political correctness. This is not a view we support. Students on the course are therefore

motivated towards personal movement and change, and should by this stage in their training have reached a level of emotional maturity which enables them to hold and accept differences in the group with integrity.

The Role of the Year Group Tutor

Tutors are clearly not part of the student body and should not attempt to become so. Yet the intensity of experience which the students go through present tutors with a dilemma which we respond to in different ways. We refer here to the level of transparency or disclosure we indulge. Whitaker [1985] has written extensively on this. As this is not group psychotherapy concerns of transference are not an issue. And pathologising experiences which result from discrimination is unhelpful and dangerous. If anything, this will be to do with those who discriminate, rather than with those who are discriminated against.

Different tutors adopt different stances: some disclose personal feelings or experiences, others choose not to, but balance is important. Those more inclined to express their feelings can be said to be modelling appropriate behaviour, yet need to retain their capacity for rational thought. Those inclined towards greater distance may enhance the group experience with occasional affective lapses. Dorothy Stock Whitaker [1985:382-3] articulates the dilemma well in the following statements, both of which have value:

Persons in groups are supported in feeling safe enough to take risks if they can hold onto the sense that there is one person in the group who retains sufficient understanding, strength, courage and disinterest to handle acutely difficult situations and emergencies should they arise.

Sharing one's feelings and reactions in the group can be a valuable thing to do when all of the persons in the group, members and therapists alike, have been exposed to the same distressing event. Sharing in an experience which touches everyone is both a human thing to do and a therapeutic thing to do. It can facilitate the members' sense of the communality of human experience, it can model for the group a willingness to confront difficult or distressing

feelings, and it can demonstrate a willingness to depart from a professional stance when circumstances seem to warrant it. Sharing is also indicated when failing to share is likely to be seen by members as unnecessary withholding.

The writers of this paper tend strongly towards showing their underbellies in the belief that such exposure indicates tutors as real people. It helps to diminish the inherent power relationship between tutor and student, and in the belief that modelling is important. Additionally we openly disagree with each other in the group to show that it is possible to do so and yet survive. This last point is about debunking one of the most frequently expressed fantasies students have: arguing with others in a group setting will somehow destroy them. This may be borne out of a sense of omnipotence or from a fear of conflict.

Conclusion

Sustainable development, so important to effective community work is, we believe, constantly mirrored for the students in the long term experiential group. The course, its structure and the methods used, represent a community development approach: it starts from where people are at; it challenges the top-down approach; it discourages assumptions being made among the students, particularly in relation to values and culture; it builds on past experience and, whilst recognising that new students may strongly take to the new ideas they pick up early in their training, the course encourages students to develop their own conceptual frameworks. This approach is made transparent to the students early on, who are encouraged to observe and evaluate the structure, methods and course content, throughout the life of the course.

The Yeargroup experience offers students the opportunity to appreciate the value and potential of group work. 'Through this dialogue intercultural communication becomes possible, and social myths and prejudices can be broken down' [Turkie 1995:164] . Students become more open to the possibility of building with others wider systems of alliance and are not bound by the language of 'us' and 'them'. When alliances are not possible our aim is for participants to develop the means by which they at least hear other points of view and are able to hold and accept difference with integrity.

As a result our students work become very effective large group workers. They are verbally articulate about their views. They are able to challenge others constructively and leave the course with increased levels of self confidence and a greater sense of personal awareness. They should develop a strong sense of their own authority: power from within, rather than a need for power over.

Learning to learn from, and draw on, experience and to reflect on it continues for students long after the life of the course. Equally, the ability to articulate complex intellectual or emotionally powerful concepts and feelings in a relatively large group setting is important, as it is often in such contexts that inter-cultural debate is most lively. Graduates of the two year diploma course in Community and Youth Work are equipped with a range of transferable skills and usually find employment in a wide variety of agencies in the public and voluntary sectors. They include among them the more ambitious and charismatic, some of whom have become leaders of national movements, members of parliament and so on. More importantly the vast majority have become solid enablers in communities throughout the country who work towards helping to create greater social justice at various levels, using means which are empowering and working in explicitly anti-oppressive ways. Many return to visit and tell us how much they hated or loved or felt ambivalent about the Yeargroup and how difficult and painful it was, only to finish with 'but I feel like I can handle any group now!'

Notes

* Black in the context of this paper includes people from diverse and cultures and locations throughout the world who share a history of 'European colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, ethnocentrism and racism' [Anastacio, J. et.al (eds.) 1990:6].

** 'Race' is presented in inverted commas in order to distinguish it from its challenged biological connotations. However, in its common usage 'race' does determine the particular ways in which society constructs difference. It is these constructions of difference, and the resulting mechanisms for social and economic exclusion and inclusion, with which we are most concerned.

*** Dorothy Stock Whitaker refers to the concept of associational flow when describing the phenomenon in group settings in which what is said by one person triggers related comments by others. This is of course appropriate and natural in discussion, but inappropriate if, for instance each member of a group is asked "how has your work been today?" in a wind-down session. Associational flow is also influenced by affective tone and non-verbal behaviour, as well as verbal communication.

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Jean Anastacio & Alan Turkie
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Phase 1: Unknowing & Unconscious Feelings

The course agenda

What are group members feeling?

- Anxiety - new start, new people
- "Where do I stand in the group?"
- Need for belonging
- Need for recognition:
 - amongst peers
 - by tutors

What happens in the group?

- Emphasis on personal & social identity
- Unobtrusive facilitating style

- Conflict between fear of exposing 'private self' and desire to show 'private self'

- 'Outer self' is made visible to others in the group

- Desire for external leadership
- Fear of vacuum
- Need to homogenise, and to avoid conflict

- Some group members take up leadership positions, often leading to resentment by others.
- Societal roles mirrored in the group.

Phase 2: Denial & Resistance

The course agenda

- Social policy debates focus on:
race,
gender,
class,
sexual orientation
and special needs.

- Community work focus on social justice.

- Yeargroup tutors continue to let group process take its course.

What are group members feeling?

- Defenses dominate as group members fear expression of their true feelings.
- Continued need to deny difference.

What happens in the group?

- Privileged students acknowledge disadvantage of others, but deny their own advantage.
- Oppressed students deny their hurt and anger.
- Culturally defined sub-groupings begin to form.
- Unspoken stand-off between sub-groupings.

Phase 3: Entrenchment, as conflict hits the surface

The course agenda

- Yeargroup tutors encourage recognition and debate of difference.
- Recognition of potential value of sub-groups

What are group members feeling?

- Conscious and unconscious feelings of hurt and anger become closer to the surface.
- Strength derived from membership of culturally-defined sub-groups.

What happens in the group?

- Outbursts of angry feelings become manifest in the group.
- Sub-groups become more rigid and entrenched.

Phase 4: Conflict, leading to new levels of understanding

The course agenda

- Tutors encourage group members to value negative feelings.
- Group members encouraged to make links between group experience and work practice.

What are group members feeling?

- Group members face their feelings of hurt, and capacity to hurt others.

What happens in the group?

- Greater openness and honesty resulting from increased emotional maturity of group.
- 'Warfare' breaks out on various fronts.
- Personal movement and change.

- Realisation that expression of true feelings can lead to greater intimacy/understanding of others.

Phase 5: Acknowledgement of difference, and resolution

<u>The course agenda</u>	<u>What are group members feeling?</u>	<u>What happens in the group?</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on acknowledging difference, and respect for others.• Encourage links to be made between group experience and community & youth work practice.• Ending phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is possible to survive the hostility of others.• Others will survive my hostile feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More exposure of inner selves leads to deepening of contact.• Sub-groups become less defended.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mourning ending of the group and/or feelings of relief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some reconciliations. Some recognition/resolution of differences.