

ICCP Conference. Brno . “Social change increases the importance of special provision and trained workers for the leisure needs of the “Forgotten Group (11-15)”

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Abstract :

Social change is increasing the risk of psycho-social maladjustment in the pre- and early adolescent stage, when young people are seeking independence from adult direction and testing out and experimenting with social relationships and behaviour and preparing for entry to adult society. Research shows that these young people have the highest amount of free time without adult supervision and use it largely to explore Internet and forms of mass media which exposes them to all forms of mal-practice of adult society. There is widespread recorded evidence that the first signs of maladjustment or mis-behaviour occur during this developmental stage. Yet the author’s comparative studies in Europe, USA and Australasia, of support services for young people in their free-time, shows that in every country these services are reduced or non-existent at this developmental stage. It would appear that adult society does not understand that normal institutional provision is not sufficient to meet the needs of this developmental stage. In any case it is doubtful if the assumptions of normal adult-directed services are capable of meeting the challenge of the independent and testing-out behaviour, named by the author, in other papers, as ‘the Forgotten Group’. Special understanding is needed to provide special non-institutional support for those passing through this stage and special training is required to cope with the challenge they present for those working with them. The paper will briefly describe such training based on theories of experiential learning and studies of group behaviour.

Introduction to paper at the Conference Presentation Session.

This paper supports advocacy for opportunities for free self-expressive play, outside of institutions and without the influence of control and direction of adults, for all children and young people at all stages of development. It presents conclusions arrived at from my study, research and experimentation trying to solve the basic problem which is posed in the abstract. The reference list provides the academic basis.

The paper aims to provide pedagogic guidance to others interested in the same problem. The subject and problem is neglected in the study and research on children’s play and I feel the need to describe the personal experience which led me to regard it as one of the most important challenges to those interested in improving conditions for the development of children and young people.

I graduated in sociology and then took postgraduate studies in social work and in counselling. My first employment was as a careers consultant for boys leaving secondary schools in a large industrial city in Northern England. After several years of giving them and their parents, an advisory interview in the year before they left school and a placement interview in their final term, I was disillusioned. I considered that the majority of them were totally unprepared to face the reality of work and life outside the school. Most of their parents had an unreal picture of their children and their capacity. I considered that the schools had failed in their task of helping the pupils towards maturity and independence and of advising the parents on how to provide support for children facing these tasks.

I needed to understand why the schools were failing so many pupils, so I trained as a teacher and was appointed to a large boys’ secondary school in the centre of the city. As a sociologist having no recognised school teaching subject, I was made class teacher of the lowest grade pupils in their final year and a careers and social studies teacher for other final year pupils. I, therefore, had good opportunity to study closely the failures and also to compare with the progress of the rest at the end of their school career. To get a better all-round view of these pupils I took an appointment in the evenings as leader of a large inner city youth club which many older pupils attended in their leisure time. After several years I realised that the school system was too inflexible to cope with the variety of needs presented by the socially complex school population. Many pupils could accommodate to the system and its demands. But many could not, due largely to their social context of family and environment. The school had no real understanding of, or method of dealing with, these outside influences. At the same time I

was meeting the failing pupils in their leisure time in the freer system of the youth club and learning that they had many potentialities and much ability which the school had never discovered or utilised. This knowledge of them as individuals, showing motivation and interest, helped my relations with them in the school but was not sufficient for me to be able change their mal-adjustment to the school and the attitude of the school to them.. The answer had to be found partly in the wider community.

My opportunity to increase my understanding, came from being appointed Warden of Edinburgh University Settlement. a long-established community centre providing social and educational services for inner-city inhabitants. It had residential accommodation for students who worked voluntarily in their free-time with the local residents.

By the time I was appointed, the Settlement had moved out with the local residents who were being cleared from the inner-city slums to be re-housed in a large housing district. My task was to direct family research and experimental community social work and supervise the other neighbourhood services provided in and from the Settlement. The volunteer students' residence and the flat for me and my family were above the community social centre. We, therefore, lived among and shared the every-day life of the estate residents. I was the only professional worker who lived on the estate. All the rest who had professional contact with the residents, teachers, social workers, doctor and even the priest and church minister, came from 'outside'. All these brought with them the attitudes and expectations towards the residents of the estate which from the outset had been 'labelled' as a 'problem estate' by the 'outside world'.

Living among these 'labelled' residents gave me first-hand practical experience of the 'sociological imagination' I had learned theoretically in university.

The boundaries, limitations on freedom, and social pressure imposed by these attitudes and expectations from the 'outside' world had to be personally experienced. Families, children, and young people striving to develop and show their potential were denied by their situation. Physical details of the environment emphasised and confirmed their 'outsideness'. I wondered why, all over the estate there were empty spaces overgrown with weeds, dumped with rubbish, and unused, when children from small flats needed space to play. Going to the urban planning department to investigate I found that on the original plan of the estate every one of these spaces had been designated 'for children'. No official had seen the need or made any effort to apply the plan and no-one had told the children!!

Just as in the youth club, working with the families revealed that they had ideas and capacity to realise them. Understanding their situation and sharing it one could help them to develop projects and begin to change their environment. Gradual development brought changes in the attitudes of the outside world. At my 'leaving party' after years of living there, one of the 'cleaners' in the Settlement, a grandmother, whose children now lived as parents in the estate where they had grown up, came to say goodbye. She had proved to be, despite her lowly public status, one of the most important 'local opinion-leaders' and an active worker with many of the successful projects we had worked on together. "You have had a tremendous effect on life of this estate" she said and paused. I waited, expecting her to mention some of our professional achievements together. "Yes!" she said "a great many young fathers are now ready to take care of their baby since you first started wheeling your daughter's pram round the estate" I said goodbye realising that my understanding was still growing!!

This need to understand the people we work with and to appreciate their view of their situation, I took with me when I returned to the academic world. As Director of the largest professional training faculty in Scotland for social workers and community educators I had the task of shaping the national curriculum for these professions. I ensured that the training should be based on the lessons I had learned in the Settlement. Every student would be encouraged first to understand those with whom they worked and to study the social environment and its effects. They would then go on to learn how to work on a level with the people and help them to discover their own potential, choose their own goals and how to achieve them.

It proved worthwhile when many of the first students took experimental and challenging posts out in depressed and so-called 'problem areas' and began to show that it was possible to help them to change their 'label'. I hope you forgive the indulgence of this personally biased introduction and that it will encourage you to read the paper and to understand the reasons behind it.

Conference Paper .

It was Ericsson, who first drew attention to the special nature of the adolescent stage and the roles and tasks which have to be resolved in passing through it. These tasks of developing independence from the parents and from other adults, identifying self, and discovering and experimenting in social relationships, force the adolescent,

with others in the same stage, into separating themselves from within society. This group dependency upon the gang of others who wish to separate themselves from adult direction and control, presents a difficult challenge to all adults who have to, or wish to, work with them. As the gang relationships extend over age boundaries the gang becomes too difficult to deal with for most institutions like schools which base programmes on homogeneous age groupings. The gang members, seeking for self-identity and independence, support each other in rejecting the forced choices of the structured programmes which typify most out-of school provision.

The classic sociological study of the gang was provided over fifty years ago by Whyte in “Street-Corner Society”. He described how groups of youngsters, drawn together by circumstance of living in the same neighbourhood, or of experiencing the same life style, or of facing the same social difficulties or tasks, gradually increased the frequency of contact with each other and isolated themselves from other relationships. As their contact increased they assumed different roles in the group, depending on their personal qualities and attributes and these roles hardened into fixed positions which earned them status in the group but also increased their dependence upon the group. Whyte observed how, due to lack of socially legitimate opportunities to demonstrate ability and earn status, the gang members increasingly resorted to socially illegitimate activity.

Since the time of Whyte, there has been concern in adult society regarding the increase in deviant behaviour which research shows is fostered by group pressure within this separated existence. Recent media coverage of gang-related murders of children shows the darkest side of this situation. My comparative studies confirm that Whyte’s description is still valid for adolescent gang behaviour today. The need for the support of the gang is being increased today by the alienation of our modern society. Today there are also increased opportunities for gang development through increasing unsupervised free time. Yet my comparative studies reveal universal decrease in public provision for the leisure time of this developmental stage. This glaring avoidance of the needs of this stage has led me, in past publications, to label these young people as “ The Forgotten Group”.

But this lack of provision and opportunity may also be due to an increasing fear among adults of how to work with the challenge of the gang. To work with the Forgotten Group adults face a dilemma . Firstly to find methods and opportunities to show adult care and concern and secondly, to pursue the social goals of fostering acceptable behaviour in the face of the strong opposition which comes from the cohesion and support of the gang and which is based on a rejection of adult authority. Most adult attempts are defeated by this resistance and rejection. But their hopeful attempts are justified because research confirms that, under this demonstrative resistance to adult control or even guidance or suggestion, the Forgotten Group has a concealed need for, if unadmitted, interest in contact with and support of adults. This paper aims to help to solve the dilemma of those who wish to work with this developmental stage. It is based on my own experience in working with ‘outsider youth’ and my work in training people to work with groups in a variety of situations. In that work I have applied my interpretation of the methods and observations of researchers whose work I now choose to describe in the paper.

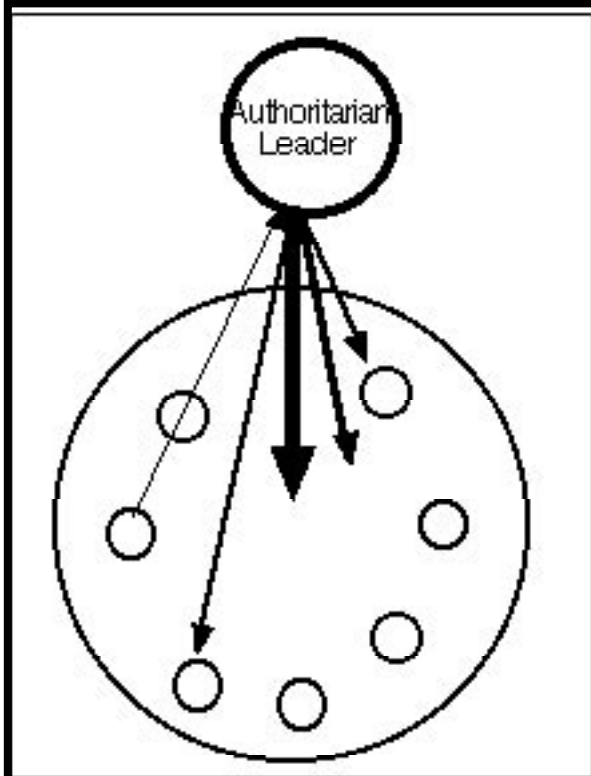
Valuable understanding for prospective workers can be gained from Whyte’s description of how the leader of the gang gained his position by excelling at one or more of the basic activities which first brought the group together. The leader then increased his position and power by carefully selecting gang activities which confirmed his superior ability and thereby increased his status as leader and confirmed the relative lower status of the other members of the group. By manipulating the gang activity and his attitude to other members, he could keep control over their relative status in the group and so avoid challenge to his authority. Whyte also described how the gangleader’s freedom to choose his own development and action was also restricted by his dependence on the group’s acceptance and support, The leader and gang were enclosed within this reciprocal interdependence.

This understanding clarifies a risk in the dilemma for the prospective worker wanting to work with the Forgotten Group. It can be tempting to use the methods of the leader in White’s study to assume such a leadership position. Many structured activity programmes contain this assumption with the leader as expert and role-model in the chosen programme. But the goals of the gang leader are entirely opposite to all the principles and philosophy upon which concerned adults wish to base their work with young people. If adult workers use the same methods of manipulating the group activity to gain group support they can only succeed in being drawn in to the system of interdependence of the gang as described above and so deny young people chances to extend their learning experience and so grow in personal identity and choice, which should be the aim of work with youth.

In the same period as Whyte’s study, Kurt Lewin’s field theory and leadership studies with experimental groups provided further evidence of the need for this deeper understanding by workers of the dynamics of the group. Lewin trained researchers to lead groups in three different styles, The leader in the authoritarian role chose the activity and took all the decisions needed to guide the group to a successful achievement of the goal.(Fig 1.) In the democratic role the leader encouraged understanding of the choice and effects of possible goals and the efforts needed to reach them. The members participated in all the decisions to reach the goal and contributed with

their own skills to the process of reaching the goal. (Fig 2). In the laissez -faire role the leader merely collected the group together and was present during their attempts to work together. The laissez -faire leader did not participate in these attempts and gave no clarifying or supportive help.(Fig 3)

In Lewin's study the authoritarian group were first to complete the task and when questioned most members were content with this achievement. The democratic group took longer to complete the task but all the



These diagrams are my interpretation of the processes studied by Lewin and which were replicated in training work as described. Observers used a method developed by Bales which consists of drawing lines to indicate inter-communication by words, gestures or other signs of interest and response. Thickness of lines indicate strength of the contribution and arrows show the direction of the message. Arrows to the centre indicate contributions to the group as a whole. The pattern becomes very complex with lines piling upon and inter-secting but this builds a clear picture (named as a sociogram by Bales) of the process of interaction and where the strongest influences have emerged. Isolates due to rejection or withdrawal can easily be identified:

I have kept these examples simple in order to show the styles . The difference in strength of the group and leader surround lines indicate the difference in group/leader emphasis during the exercise.

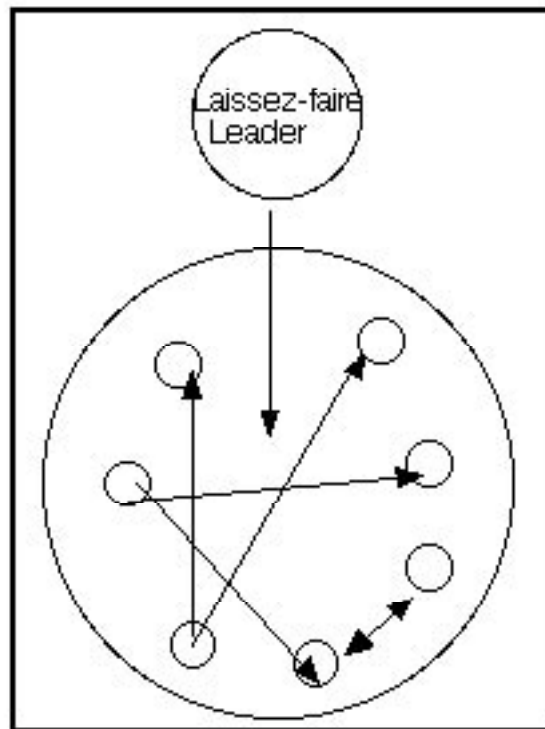
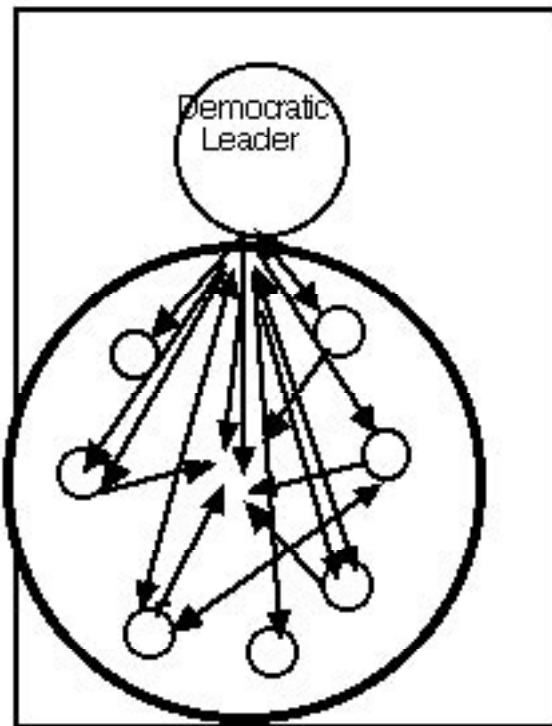


Fig.3. In the laissez-faire style above, the leader stays at a distance to discourage members from involving him/her, hardly defining himself/herself as related to the group. Gives minimum or weak direction. Members look for help from each other but no common process develops and interaction is weak.

Fig.1. Authoritarian style top left. All initiatives are taken by the leader who makes strong directives (thick lines) and mainly to the group as a whole (to centre) and rarely to individuals . This limits feedback and maintains members in an inferior position so that he/she can dominate the process. He/she keeps a controlling distance from the group to discourage member participation.

Fig 2. in the democratic style the leader makes fewer directive messages to the group but gives his/her attention to all and this encourages them to respond and also to direct their attention to others in the group. This encourages a 'group as a whole' process to develop with members taking initiative: He /she reduces the distance from the group to encourage feedback and 'group as a whole' decisions.

members were very satisfied with the process and felt they had gained from it personally. The laissez-faire group did not succeed in their attempts to define and achieve the task and were very dissatisfied with the process and had found it an unrewarding experience.

An even more significant finding emerged in the second stage of Lewin's experiments. In this stage of the research Lewin constructed a plausible reason for the leader to leave the group for a considerable period during the work on the task. In the authoritarian situation the group suspended work whilst it tried to organise itself and to decide on process until the leader returned. It then completed the task but members were dissatisfied, The democratic group proceeded with the task as before, with members contributing to the process and completing the task and feeling very satisfied. In the laissez-faire group, work stopped and the group lost cohesion and did not proceed. Members were very dissatisfied.

These findings can be interpreted simply, as that the authoritarian situation had proceeded on learning dependent on the leader and members had gained little which they could apply independently on their own initiative. The democratic situation had enabled members to gain independent learning which they could then apply themselves. The laissez-faire situation had been a negative learning experience.

In my training work, Lewin's studies were replicated with workers being trained in the different leader roles and others being participants in the different style groups. Others workers observed and recorded the different processes.. Then all workers discussed the observations and their feelings in the different roles and processes. This application of Lewin's work was useful in training workers to understand how to develop a democratic approach. Particularly as, at that time, most work with young people assumed an authoritarian and structured approach with a strong emphasis on the adult worker modelling adult society values. But as I will explain later the approach needed refining beyond the normal understanding of democracy and it did little to help with the problem of making initial contact with the gang and securing the interest of members.

Lewin's further work helped with this refinement. Developing workshops in group observation skills Lewin discovered that the accidental interruption of a trainee's objections into his (Lewin's) interpretation of behaviour in a group, led to a greater depth of discussion. This encouraged Lewin to extend all his training workshops to sessions in which trainees and trainers participated together in the analysis of observation and recording of 'their' 'here and now' experience These gradually developed as so-called 'T-Group' workshops into which Lewin introduced the concept of 'feedback' which he borrowed from electrical engineering. He used the concept to describe how the behaviour and performance of group members could be changed and improved by receiving and understanding the results of observation and recording results of their previous behaviour.

The work of Robert Bales took this understanding further. Bales was a social psychologist who was strongly influenced by the field theory developed by Lewin on his research and training experience. Field theory conceptualised the behaviour of individuals in groups. It was seen as the combined influence together of the characteristics of others and of the individuals themselves acting as interacting forces in a social field. Bales built upon this concept and concentrated on observing and analysing the behaviour of members in interaction in groups.. He developed his theory of social interaction in which the group and its activity, rather than the individual, was the unit of analysis. He still, however, remained closely interested in the role of individual personality in social interaction.

Bales particular help to the problem of this paper was in his development of methods of observation and measurement of interaction processes. He developed methods, which he called SYMLOG - the SYstematic Multi Level Observation of Groups and technical innovations for measuring group interaction. I found that these methods and those of Lewin, described above, could be adapted for the training of workers to solve the problems posed in the abstract of this paper

I used a training model similar to that of a post-graduate course developed by Bales and based on experience of students in practical placements. Trainees were divided into self-analytic groups and discussed their own interactions in order to learn about the problems faced by themselves as group members and by those working with the group. In my work I used group rooms interlinked by a Closed Circuit TV system to enable groups to make systematic observation of other groups and to record and feed back the results of their observations (including the TV replay to support their comments)

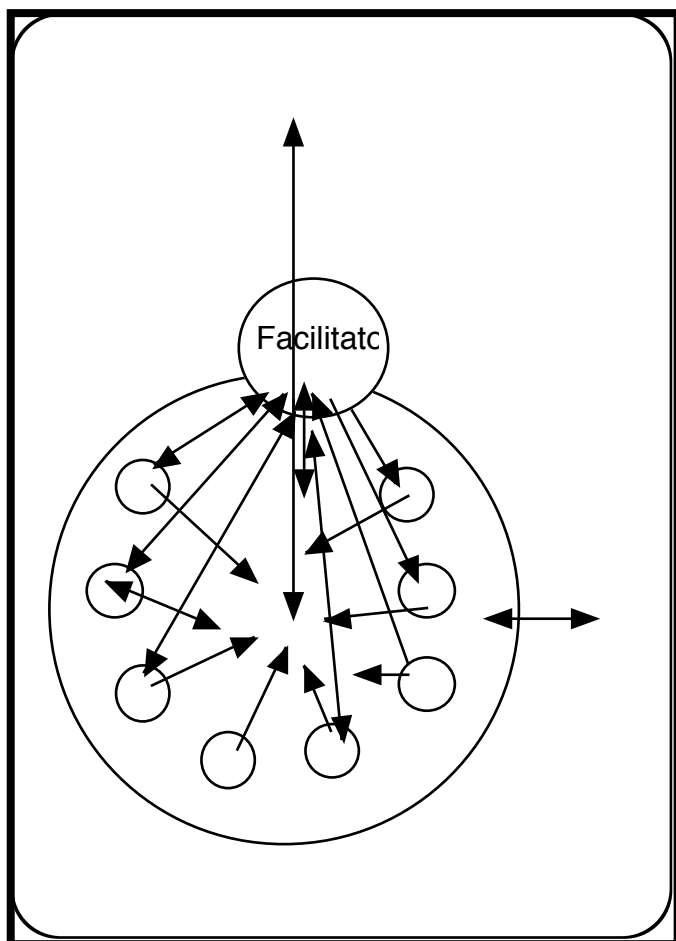
In this work certain concepts could be clarified and applied, which were especially helpful to the training problem of this paper.

Firstly, Bales' conclusion that groups were always operating on two levels - that of task behaviour and that of socio-emotional behaviour. Sometimes these were complementary and supportive but more often they were in conflict. Bales concluded that the more the group concentrated upon the task the more the social-emotional needs of the group were neglected or suppressed (confirming Whyte's description of how the gang leader used

task activity to keep the group under his control). Bales showed that suppression of feelings by over-emphasis on task could build up emotional pressure which could slow up the task work of the group or even explode and stop the task work . In some cases the socio-emotional needs of the group needed to become the task even if they seemed to be slowing or diverting attention from the primary task. Workers in training, using Bales recording methods, (assisted by TV recording or feedback from other observers) could analyse their behaviour in situations constructed to emphasise task or socio-emotional processes. In this way they learned much about their own reaction to group stress and pressure and how to help groups manage the balance between the two areas of behaviour.

Secondly, Bales conclusion that leadership in groups was rarely one simple or homogeneous or uni-centred role as that of the leader in Whyte's study. His observations confirmed that such an interpretation of the role limited and starved the group. He showed that, on the contrary, in groups which were successfully adaptable to variable situations the role of leadership was made up of a complexity of behaviours which no single leader could fulfil. His observations listed and categorised these different aspects of the task. He found that many of the different aspects were assumed by different members of the group and at different times depending on the situation or task . Some of these aspects could be classified as positive task efforts - such as clarifying goals or identifying decisions to be made, others as negative task efforts such as denying progress or obstructing other contributions. Some as positive socio-emotional, such as approving contributions or identifying success, others as negative socio-emotional such as expressing distrust or disappointment or criticism . Some as neutral - such as providing new information or facts. Using Bales breakdown of leadership behaviour into these different aspects as a basis for recording, workers in training could receive feedback of their performance in different aspects of the leadership role and learn how to share out and involve others in widening the capacity of the group.

This conclusion helped the refining of the role of the democratic leader which I referred to as necessary earlier. This role needs to include the ability to identify in the membership of the group, all the potential contributions to the complex and variable total leadership needs of the group. Even more important the role needed the ability to encourage members to fulfil their potential in the group . Workers needed to learn to accept and support the contributions of any member. In my training work I describe this refined role as that of facilitator rather than leader. The facilitator (Fig 4) emphasises creating opportunities for others to identify the goal and task and to make their contribution to the group process. Often this ability to create opportunities for others means suppressing an easier opportunity to make the contribution oneself. This requirement to be prepared to conceal one's own capacity in order to develop the capacity of other members of the group is most difficult for many adults and is the most likely barrier to success in working with the Forgotten Group.



This paper has aimed to show that the most important capacity for the potential worker with groups to develop is that of sensitivity to the group process and the ability to interpret and respond to the needs of the group. This cannot be learned by reading or listening to lectures. It must be built upon what Carl Rogers has called experiential learning. The paper has described how experiential learning in specially constructed and supervised practical experiences can develop understanding and increase capacity in the worker.

In the finality, however, sensitivity to respond to the group and to facilitate the group's own response and to learn to suppress one's own capacity is not a cognitive process. It has to be experienced socio-emotionally by participating in groups constructed to facilitate sensitivity. In this stage of my work I found the writings and teaching of Wilfrid Bion the most helpful. Bion was a psycho-analyst who studied and practised in many group situations - therapeutic and otherwise . He took his studies of group experience to a deeper psycho-analytical level than Bales. His writings were many and complex but focussed down upon the family group as underlying all other group experiences. His main contribution towards the problem of this paper is that, especially in his work in the Tavistock Clinic in London, he stimulated group experience meetings or sensitivity

workshops designed to help members of groups to learn more about their understanding of their behaviour . In these groups he or a consultant trained in his theory, interpreted the behaviour of the group by comments designed to keep the members focussed on trying to understand the process in the group and their position within it.. He believed that underlying all group situations ,members were attempting to resolve conflicts or issues arising from. what he called ‘basic assumption’ behaviour. He classified three types of ‘basic assumption behaviour’.

Fight/ Flight where the individual sways between fighting the primary task behaviour or flying from it by escaping into some unimportant issue,

Pairing where the individual seeks for some other individual in the group who can offer support or similar attitudes to the task.

Dependency where the individual seeks for a member to provide a model to follow.

According to Bion the behaviour in ordinary ‘work groups’ often lapses into this ‘basic assumption’ behaviour where members are being influenced by feelings which are not related to the task. In order to understand this process and its possible relevance for the training of workers I attended in 1970-2 “Group Experience Workshops’ organised by the Tavistock Institute for workers learning to apply Bion’s teaching. Experience Groups were organised in workshops, lasting a week in a residential situation which members were not allowed to leave. The whole time was spent analysing the behavior of the group under the guidance of a consultant trained to help focus the group on its behaviour by occasional interpretative comments. The analysis was even applied to behaviour outside the group sessions.

Like many psycho-analytical theories, the group experience workshops began to develop Bion interpretations rather like a faith which could answer all behaviour needs. I am opposed to such claims and instead, I have used it, as a helpful tool among many others described above, of understanding group behaviour. Therefore, after attending several of these residential workshops I felt that I had gained enough understanding of my own behaviour in groups and considerable enlightenment as to the way in which groups functioned or did not function. I learned how aggression and pressure could build up in the group due to feelings underlying the surface process. These feelings had to be brought to the surface but the real reason was often too difficult to express. Instead they were often directed towards the consultant/leader/worker. I observed how the consultant accepted the aggression without reacting personally and then by carefully selected short comments redirected the focuss of the group back to explore the reason for the frustration, fear, or disappointment. This experience has been valuable in developing my own role in groups as a training consultant. It also confirmed me in my view that workers could only learn to work in groups by being helped to understand their own behaviour in real group situations.

The paper has sought to explain the difficulty of working with the gang group and to describe how to build up understanding of the dynamics of the group. The solution of how to make contact and secure the interest of the gang group is most likely provided by applying understanding of the many-faceted aspects of the group task. By carefully studying the situation and behaviour of the gang it is possible to identify some aspects in which the group shows weaker capacity and where an offer of support limited to this particular weakness can provide a basis for development. By studying the complex list it is possible to identify certain contributions which are particularly suitable for adults to offer; In the early stages of contact these are most likely to be found in the neutral area of information and facts. Once contact has been established with a degree of security and trust on both sides, then it can gradually be extended as other aspects open themselves up as areas of inter-communication and cooperation . It is a slow process and cannot be forced or pressured forward as often required in public services.

I hope the paper can serve as encouragement to extend support services for the free-time of the Forgotten Goup. I hope it can be used as an explanation or argument for the importance of the full-time employment of specially trained workers to work with the Forgotten Group.

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